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Marxism Today

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Is the theory of crisis out of date?

Emile Burns

SINCE the war there has been a general advance in industrial production in the capitalist world. But it has not been a continuous advance. In the United States, for example, industrial production was checked in 1949 and again in 1954, and in 1956 and 1957 it was once more slowing down. In Britain the fluctuations were not so sharp as in the United States, but production fell instead of rising in 1952 and again in 1956. In the early months of 1957 it was running at about the 1956 level.

Now this is not at all a picture of a capitalism that has overcome its difficulties and is marching steadily forward. It is in sharp contrast with socialist economy in the Soviet Union, where production rises year after year without interruption.

Nevertheless, it is true that in spite of temporary recessions there has been no deep and lasting fall in United States or British production such as we associate with the crises of the years between the wars. And it is now over twelve years since the end of the war, whereas earlier crises developed fairly regularly at intervals of seven to ten years.

As in many previous periods of capitalist boom, claims are being made that now at last capitalism has learnt how to avoid crises. Many Labour spokesmen echo this idea and build castles in the air on it. Even in our own ranks there is a feeling that our previous theory of crisis needs revision.

The questions that require an answer are therefore: Are the tendencies which gave rise to crises in the past now no longer operative, and have we to revise or substantially modify the Marxist theory of crisis? Has capitalism learnt how to overcome these tendencies, so that economic crisis is now a thing of the past? Or has the *relative* prosperity for a *relatively long* period in the capitalist world been due to special conditions? And if so, have these special conditions now lost their effect, and is the boom-slump cycle again in evidence?

The Nature of Capitalist Crisis

At the risk of over-simplification, Marx's view of crisis may be stated as follows. The regular turnover of capital in production is possible only so long as the products of each turnover are sold, at prices which restore the capital used up in the turnover plus a profit.

The history of capitalism shows that at more or less regular intervals a situation arises in which great quantities of goods that have been produced cannot be sold. As a result, the turnover of capital is checked; capitalists stop or cut down production, because there is no market for their products; unemployment spreads from one industry to another. It is of such general crises that Marx says:

> "The last cause of all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses, as compared to the tendency of capitalist production to develop the productive forces in such a way that only the absolute power of consumption of the entire society would be their limit."

Of course, only a part of total production is production of consumer goods, for direct sale to working people and other individual consumers. In a developed capitalist society, a large proportion of the national output is in the form of machinery and plant, ships and locomotives, raw materials or semi-finished products, which only capitalists buy. But they buy them as capitalists, in order to use them to produce other things which they can sell at a profit. If they do not think they can sell the final products at a profit, they do not go on buying either machinery or raw materials. In the long run, therefore, the market for capital equipment, as also the market for raw materials of all kinds, depends on the market for consumption goods.

But how long is the run? How long can the gap between rising output and relatively stagnant consumers' demand go on widening before there is an actual crisis? Experience in the whole period of capitalism up to the last great crisis in the early nineteen-thirties showed that crises occurred at intervals of seven to ten years. In *Capital,* Vol. II (p. 211), Marx suggests that the reason for this period was associated with a periodical renewal of plant; after a crisis, he says, much new plant is put in, and this stimulates output till it reaches a

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boom; then the new plant begins to produce, leading once again to over-production and a new crisis.

In *Capital* Marx called attention to the changing composition of capital—the continuous increase in the *constant capital* (machinery etc. and raw materials) in relation to the *variable capital* (wages). In the main it is wages (plus other personal incomes) that buy the final articles of consumption—food, clothing, T.V. sets, refrigerators, cars etc. Therefore the increase in the constant capital means that an increasing *proportion* of total production is in means of production (which only capitalists buy), and a smaller *proportion* is in articles of consumption. As Lenin put it: "The growth of the home market for capitalism is to a certain extent 'independent' of the growth of personal consumption." He adds: "But it goes without saying that, in the last analysis, productive consumption is always bound up with personal consumption." Nevertheless, the fact that a large and increasing part of total production is of means of production seems to have importance, especially in a period of rapid technological changes and in the period of highly developed monopolies. Monopolies may produce means of production without *direct* relation to the market for consumer goods. State action may also provide a market (especially arms orders) that has no direct relation to the consumers' market. These are factors in the situation which, if not entirely new, seem to have been of greater significance in the post-war period than in the past, and therefore need to be examined.

The Influence of Monopoly

What is in question here is not the general character of monopoly, but the influence of monopoly *on the turnover of capital.* In present conditions, it is possible for monopolies to sell their products at prices considerably above their value. This possibility arises in part from actual monopoly or monopolistic agreements between a few big companies within a country, with tariffs or import quotas to protect them from competition by foreign rivals; and in part from international agreements between monopolies—as for example in oil—which largely eliminate direct price competition between them and maintain a world price far above the value of their products.

In *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* Stalin spoke of the need of monopoly capitalism for maximum profits, for the purpose of "more or less regular extended reproduction". There are many statements from the capitalist standpoint which confirm this.

Giving evidence before the U.S. Senate Anti-Trust Sub-Committee, Professor Galbraith of Harvard University noted that "large firms in industry could set their prices virtually without regard to competitive forces . . . and so were able to increase their prices in order to finance their expansion out of retained earnings." (*The Times,* July 15th, 1957).

The Chairman of the Burmah Oil Company recently stated:

> "The finance required for the expansion of the oil industry has for the most part to be generated by the industry itself, and selling prices must accordingly be allowed to remain at a level to meet this need."
>
> (*Financial Times,* May 23rd, 1957)

The same point was made by the *Economist* (June 1st, 1957) in its report of the high margin of profit made in preceding months by the Royal Dutch Shell group:

> "The Royal Dutch Shell group needs such margins to finance its enormous capital programme (likely to be of the order of £400 million this year)."

Similar quotations can be given for a whole number of the biggest monopolies, both here and in the United States. All these monopolies have been carrying out great extensions, in the main financed out of accumulated profits—that part of the profits which is not paid out in dividend to shareholders, but is "retained for employment in the business", as the item is called in the financial reports of Imperial Chemical Industries.

It is true that capitalist enterprises, whatever their size, have always put aside a part of their profits for expansion of the business in the following year or years. However, in earlier stages of capitalist development, these reserved profits were seldom big enough by themselves for any considerable expansion. Such big expansions therefore had to be provided for by money raised from the public generally—a new issue of capital.

The growth of huge monopoly enterprises has considerably changed this. Not only are they big concerns, and therefore have a correspondingly big mass of profit, but they are *monopoly* concerns, able to raise prices above values and therefore make extra big profits. Secondly, because they sell their products above values, they take out of the total pool of surplus value a larger proportion, a higher *rate* of profit, than the smaller concerns, thus reducing the proportion available to the smaller concerns, whose rate of profit declines.

This can be illustrated by some figures from the American Labour Research Association. In 1954 American companies with assets over $100 million made a profit of 22 per cent; those with assets under $1 million made 9 per cent.

For Britain, Mr. Prais in the *Economic Journal,*

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June 1957, shows that from 1949 to 1953 the average annual rise in profits for the 100 largest concerns was 12 per cent, while for all industrial companies it was under 7 per cent. (This does not mean, of course, that no small companies made bigger profits.)

In other words, the smaller capitalists cannot have as much surplus as the bigger firms; the monopolists become more and more the only "savers", and therefore the principal investors in new capital and equipment.

Therefore an important new feature, when monopoly is fairly fully developed, is that *accumulation* (in the real sense) becomes also highly monopolised. New capital is born, so to speak, already in large amounts attached to an existing mass of capital, whose further expansion the new capital serves.

This is literally the "self-expansion of capital" of which Marx wrote. And the larger each monopoly capital gets, the greater the momentum generated for expansion and the greater the need to expand in order to compete with its rivals.

For competition does not cease to exist in the monopoly stage of capital. There are few cases of complete monopoly by a single firm, even within one country. The effect of monopoly is created by a group of firms through price agreements, sometimes quotas, sometimes limited areas of sale for each, and so on. Such agreements are inevitably temporary; but even within the framework of an agreement, each big firm is driving ahead not only to expand in general, but to produce more cheaply, to increase its profits and provide a bigger fund for expansion, or for the introduction of new specialised products that can expand its market in spite of its partner-competitors in monopoly. And a feature of this competitive drive among monopolies or big firms sharing monopolies is that new capital equipment is constantly being introduced not only *to increase the amount of production,* but to get *cheaper production.* It is common knowledge that nowadays, when machinery is replaced, what takes its place is very often something of a newer type, something that saves labour for the same output.

For this reason it is not only the amounts placed to reserve out of profits that serve a big concern as a fund for new capital equipment. There is also the amount set aside each year for depreciation of existing plant, before the net profit is arrived at. Chairmen of companies explain the increase in the amounts set aside for depreciation as a necessity in a period of rising prices because new plant will cost more when the old has to be replaced. This is no doubt true. But in fact, because of the competition referred to above, the replacement is more rapid than it used to be; more plant is replaced before it is physically depreciated or worn out. This so-called "moral" depreciation, as distinct from physical, expresses the fact that in the battle of giants a more efficient machine has been invented; the old one is scrapped before its time, so as to get ahead of rival firms or at least keep up with them. Or, as in the motor industry, it may be a case of constantly producing new models, requiring some different plant, in order to keep a share in the market or even outdistance rivals.

But if what would in previous times have been depreciated in five or ten years is now depreciating "morally" and flung out in two or three years, the amount set aside as depreciation each year must be greatly increased. As an illustration of this tendency, a quotation from the *Economist* (May 21st, 1955) shows it at work in I.C.I. Noting a £5 million increase in the depreciation item in Imperial Chemical Industries accounts for 1954, the journal observes:

> "The charge must naturally rise as the expensive new plant comes in. But the board have also reviewed depreciation policy, and for some items of plant *they have shortened the assumed lives.*"

Legislation reducing tax on profits used for new plant favours this tendency. In the United States such legislation is particularly favourable. Total depreciation allowances to U.S. industry rose from $20 billion in 1949 to $34 billion in 1956.

It must be remembered that depreciation represents wear and tear of fixed capital that passes into the value, and therefore into the price, of the product. It appears as a part of the gross profit, and has to be deducted in order to get the net profit. Therefore if the depreciation is increased, the gross profit, and therefore the prices of the products, must also be increased. The monopoly profits, and the prices to bring in these profits, have consequently to cover, in addition to any dividend distribution to shareholders, *higher annual depreciation* as well as the *larger reserves for capital expansion* referred to earlier.

To speak of a drive for "maximum profit" is therefore in no way to exaggerate the aim of the monopolists; and the continuous rise in the already huge profits of the monopolies shows that in recent years their drive has met with no little success.

John Strachey, in *Contemporary Capitalism,* after referring to the growth of big concerns and saying that their managers are no longer their owners, observes that the managers conduct these enterprises in a different manner from the days of managing owners. No doubt they do: but it

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is a little surprising to find that he goes on to say (p. 37):

> ". . . if they had attempted to conduct the giant enterprises of today in the strict tradition of the individual capitalist, seeking, with singleness of mind, *to maximise his profit,* they would have disrupted the whole social fabric in a few years."

Perhaps the skilled manager of today maximises his profit accidentally, without singleness of mind or even intention, but it is noteworthy that he *does* maximise his profit, as all statistics show, and as the chairmen of these companies declare is necessary for the reasons stated above. Perhaps, however, Marx's point that it is *capital* and its *self-expansion* that does the trick explains how the manager reaches his happy result without mental trouble. It is the system, and the gigantic masses of capital, that determine the outcome.

So that when Strachey tries to answer the question—Why do the directors of the monopolies (oligopolies) keep on accumulating "if the process benefits them, individually and financially, but remotely, if at all"?—he is led into such subjective explanations as "prestige and power, rather than wealth".

Now there may be all sorts of individual motives mixed up with the making of big profits by a monopoly. But in the actual handling of affairs the manager of someone else's plant, no less than the capitalist who runs his own plant, is merely a representative of capital in a capitalist system, and the bigger the capital the more relentless its drive on him to maximise profits.

What then are the economic effects that monopoly—high prices and maximum profit to depreciate plant rapidly and provide big sums for expansion—has on the turnover of capital?

First, it makes the turnover of fixed capital greater and more rapid than in earlier days; the industries producing fixed capital equipment will be getting repeat orders or new orders more quickly, and on a larger scale: their production will be more continuous and will be slower to respond to a decline in the volume of demand for articles of consumption. In fact, more machinery is being used up in proportion to a given level of consumption of goods. So long as the going is good, therefore, production of machinery and plant—to the extent that industry is monopolised—is at a higher level than in pre-monopoly days. Monopolies may plan development for a long way ahead, and may carry out these plans even if there is a decline in the effective demand for their final products.

At the same time, however, this increasing demand for means of production from the monopolies does not mean that capitalism can now run on producing greater and greater amounts of means of production without regard to the final market for products—the people's purchasing power. A witness before the U.S. Senate Anti-Trust Committee said that "American business recently had been raising prices while operating at less than capacity", and warned of the "mounting danger" of fixing prices and reducing production to what the market would take at that level of price (*The Times,* July 15th, 1957).

In fact, monopoly's need for and ability to fix high prices must become a barrier to sales. The high monopoly prices affect not only the smaller capitalists as capitalists (robbing them of a part of their share of total surplus value), but the whole nation, in so far as articles of consumption are concerned. The high monopoly prices are an important factor in the general inflation since the war. In effect, a part of total consumers' purchasing power is lopped off to pay the extra prices demanded by the monopolists. Monopoly, therefore, while to some extent stimulating the production of means of production, is a negative factor in consumers' demand; it is one of the factors leading more rapidly to over-production in relation to the purchasing power of the people.

A special form of the expansion and competition of monopolies is the setting up of subsidiaries in the countries of rival monopolies. The aim is to get behind tariff walls, so as to compete on equal terms with those countries' monopoly concerns; partly to save transport to a distant country; in some cases to take advantage of a lower level of wages. But whatever the motive, the establishment of such subsidiary enterprises in other countries adds directly to the demand for capital goods (and to the competition which makes it necessary to renew and modernise plant quickly); to that extent it helps to maintain the demand for machinery and plant. At the same time, it is adding to the existing productive capacity of the country concerned and of the world, with inevitable results such as we have seen in the motor industry.

The Influence of State Action

The state in a capitalist country has always had some influence on the turnover of capital, on the one hand through taxation, which reduces the amount available to capitalists for new capital investment, and on the other, through state expenditure, which may help capitalist production and also increase the purchasing power of the people through social services.

However, it is in the days of monopoly capital-

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ist expansion and competition, and on the other hand of the workers' struggles for better standards of living, that the influence of the state on the turnover of capital becomes of considerable importance.

The Korean war and the subsequent arms programmes operating after 1950 have had considerable effect in maintaining the total level of production and employment in the chief capitalist countries: in Britain, for several years armaments have taken about 8 per cent of total annual production; in the United States, about 10 per cent.

It is true that large numbers of workers are employed in armaments production, and in that sense armaments give employment and are a stabilising factor in the economic situation. But on the other hand, if the Government added what it now spends on armaments to its present expenditure on such social purposes as houses, schools and hospitals, as much—probably more—direct and indirect employment would be created as is now given by armaments. When therefore people speak of Governments today using "Keynesian techniques" to maintain employment, they are using a mystifying phrase for something quite simple. The armaments drive is not an economic technique, Keynesian or otherwise, to maintain employment: it is a technique of aggression, to further the interests of monopoly capital. It is not an absolute addition to employment, but a *diversion* of employment from serving the needs of the people to destructive, or in any case wasteful, ends, so far as the people are concerned.

At the same time, the policy of arms expansion, adopted for political reasons, has had an effect on the general turnover of capital, and continues to do so. As with everything else, these effects are both positive, keeping the turnover of capital going, and negative, leading to a check in the turnover of capital.

In the first place, a considerable impetus was given in the earlier stages of rearmament to the construction and engineering industries, through Government financing of the expansions of productive capacity needed to carry through the programme. Secondly, so long as the arms drive continues, it feeds new capital (from the high profits of the arms manufacturers) into industry, helping general expansion.

On the other hand, the expansion of capacity to meet the needs of the programme came to an end long ago; and the heavy taxation and high prices resulting from the policy of armaments reduce the general purchasing power of the people; the cuts in social services have the same effect.

However, the production of armaments does not itself directly add to the final products for sale to consumers; the Government provides a market, and in the abstract the capital in armaments production could go on turning over even if the purchasing power of the people declined sharply.

In the United States an important aspect of state influence on the economy has been the guarantee of prices for many farm products, which in practice has meant that immense quantities of cotton, wheat, tobacco and other farm products have been bought and stored by the state. In this way a sharp slump in prices has been avoided; the state has temporarily solved the problem of the farmers—their capital is able to turn over as if consumers' demand absorbed their whole crop. As far as the farmer is concerned, he successfully sells his products, although no one buys them to consume them.

But the matter does not end there. It is true that in some cases the products taken by the state in this way are sent abroad, either as gifts or at cut rates: and some are destroyed—for example, the *News Chronicle* (November 24th, 1950) reported that a year's supply of potatoes for 12 million people had been destroyed. Nor is the problem of over-production of farm products—in relation to purchasing power—solved for the capitalist world by U.S. exports of surplus products. Siamese peasants, for example, have complained of losses through the United States dumping wheat there; the *Manchester Guardian* of June 20th, 1957, reports that Canada cannot find a market for its large farm surplus, "largely due to the aggressive and, in the Canadian view, unfair surplus disposal policies of the United States"; Syria complains of U.S. dumping of wheat in Italy and Central Europe, which used to buy Syrian wheat. So the United States' surplus disposal attempts are simply pushing the crisis effects on to other countries.

Moreover, in the United States itself there are negative results of the farm aid scheme. In return for the buying of surplus products from farmers the Government has insisted on a reduction of the area sown with the crops concerned. For various crops, the sown area has been reduced by 25 to 40 per cent. But as this often meant that the farmer grew something else, leading to a glut of another product, Eisenhower's latest scheme is the "land bank"—the Government is now paying farmers annual compensation on 12 million acres that have been deposited in the "bank", i.e. put out of cultivation altogether. This means unemployment for agricultural workers: betw en 1949 and 1956 employment in agricul-

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ture fell by a million and a half, from 8 million to 6½ million. It also means a fall in demand for agricultural machinery and implements. Thus the much-boosted farm aid scheme relieves over-production in one form only to bring about a considerable fall in employment and in total purchasing power, leading to more over-production. The taxes necessary to finance the scheme also have the same tendency.

The United States foreign aid programmes have likewise helped to provide an outlet for United States products; they have served to provide manufacturers with a market financed by the state, but again at the cost of more taxation on the people.

In Britain, apart from the arms programme already referred to, the most important state influence on the turnover of capital has been the re-equipping of the nationalised industries. Of the total new capital in Britain during recent years, a considerable proportion has been in these industries. With the plans for development in electricity and atomic energy, the change to diesel engines on the railways, and other technical improvements, the demand for buildings, plant and machinery for the nationalised industries may continue for some years.

To a certain extent the social services in Britain also represent a stabilising factor in the economy; but to the extent that workers' contributions pay for these services, they do not represent an addition to total demand but merely a transfer of demand. The same is indirectly true for the state contributions, which are financed by extra taxation; while it is generally assumed that the employers' contributions are made good by higher prices.

In general, while state intervention may help the turnover of capital by various devices, in the monopoly capitalist state every effort is made to throw the cost of these devices on to the shoulders of the people, reducing their purchasing power. The credit squeeze, high interest rates, rent increases and the general policy of encouraging high prices alongside high taxation, all tend towards lowering the purchasing power of the people and reducing the market for consumer goods.

What Then of the Boom-Slump Cycle?

It is generally agreed that war breaks the cycle. This is because the normal turnover of capital, with its ultimate dependence on the purchasing power of the people, is largely replaced by state orders, which provide a vast market for products of all kinds. The concentration on a state-provided market also involves a reduction in the output of consumer goods, and during the war it is impossible to replace worn-out machinery or instal new plant except in the arms industries. Shortages develop, not surpluses.

But immense profits on state contracts were made during the Second World War, especially by the bigger concerns. Moreover, since it was impossible to renew plant during the war, there were considerable reserves in depreciation funds. Accumulated profits and depreciation funds represented a mass of money capital awaiting investment.

When the war ended, therefore, these sums entered the market, and with the change to peace production there was a boom in building, machinery and equipment. Prices for these rose, and a general rise in prices followed. In Britain particularly the boom was further encouraged by the new chances for exports, owing to the temporary absence of German and Japanese competition.

If therefore the ending (or sharp reduction) of state orders in 1945 meant that the normal turnover of capital was resumed, then the following years can be taken as the stages of revival and boom in the first post-war cycle in Britain.

In the course of the revival and boom, wages lagged considerably behind the rise in prices. It was inevitable, therefore, that the gap between production and purchasing power should widen. So long as this was concealed by rising exports, all went well. But with the return of German and Japanese competition in export markets from about 1950, overproduction in consumer goods began to appear in Britain. Through 1951 and 1952 consumer goods production fell, and in 1952 there was an actual fall in Britain's total production.

Why was the 1952 recession in Britain so short-lived? Why did it not develop into a major crisis?

But first let us look at the United States. There, too, immense war profits had been made, and although the end of war contracts brought production to a low point in 1946, orders for new plant produced a revival and boom in 1947 and 1948. Then came a sharp recession, with a fall in total production in 1949. But this recession too was short, and by 1950 (before the Korean war) the upswing had begun, and there was no major crisis. Again in 1954 there was a sharp recession in the United States, which did not lead to a crisis there or elsewhere.

Nevertheless, it seems clear that the normal working of the cycle—boom, overproduction, relative stagnation of purchasing power, leading to a cut in production—was present both here and in the United States. But the boom and the subsequent cut in production took place at different times in the two countries, owing to the particular

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conditions in each country at the end of the war.

In Western Germany and Japan, too, the timing of the boom was different; in fact, it was only after about 1950 that German industry in particular came back to large-scale production. When the 1954 recession came in the United States, British industry was busy supplying Western Germany's needs.

The development of world economic crises in the previous history of capitalism was associated with the fact that a world market existed, of such a character that prices were world prices and supplies were world supplies. Economic developments in any country could not but affect conditions in every other country. Booms and slumps were more or less simultaneous in all countries.

But since the Second World War conditions have been different. The economic development has not been simultaneous, and the "world market" has been divided up not only by the spread of socialism but also by exchange difficulties leading to bilateral agreements, devaluation, quotas and defensive measures of all kinds by every capitalist country. The direct interdependence of the past is now far from complete.

Therefore we have depressions in one country or another without the former immediate effects on other countries; and it has been easier for one country to recover from a depression when boom conditions existed in other countries.

Moreover, the Korean war and the great armaments programmes that followed it in the major capitalist countries certainly gave an important stimulus to production and helped the recovery from depression both here and in the United States.

It seems, therefore, that the questions raised earlier have to be answered as follows:

The tendencies in capitalist production which gave rise to crises in the past have been operating in the post-war period, and there is no reason to abandon or substantially modify the Marxist theory of crises. Rising production, combined with relatively stagnant purchasing power, leads to overproduction and a check to the turnover of capital.

That no large-scale crisis has developed from these depressions is due in the first place to the results of the war, which affected different countries differently, so that the timing of their cycles has been different, while in contrast with pre-war conditions the economies of the capitalist countries have been to a certain degree independent of each other.

At the same time, the Korean war and the rearmament drive—a state demand for products outside of the normal turnover of capital—have been factors that stimulated total production.

Two further factors have been of significance in maintaining total production—monopoly competition and investment, in a period of rapid technical change; and state intervention in addition to arms (as a market in the United States; as an investor of capital here).

All these factors have combined to maintain a high level of production and an absence of serious economic crises in the period since the war.

But now the last question arises: Is this going to continue? What are the prospects for the future?

It has already been suggested that some of the factors that have helped to maintain production also have their negative effects: the monopolists' drive requires high prices which restrict the market; armaments and other state interventions *mean more taxes which restrict the market.* But it is not as simple as that. The successful fight for higher wages can go a long way to maintain the purchasing power of the people, perhaps even to increase it. The refusal to accept any form of wage freeze has certainly been of importance in Britain. In any case, there is no fixed point at which production increasing faster than purchasing power automatically results in a crisis.

The immediate starting point of a crisis is different from its ultimate cause. At some part of the whole strained economy breaking-point is reached, and the crisis develops.

For the present, it is only possible to point to the developing strain on the economy.

The essence of the situation is that production has been maintained on the basis of armaments and the big monopolies modernising their plant and increasing productive capacity, but that the purchasing power of the people for consumer goods has not increased to anything like the same degree. The gap between production capacity and purchasing power is widening.

So far as the United States is concerned, this process has gone much further than it has in Britain.

It shows itself, up to the present, not in a sharp fall in production, but in the inability of United States capital to use its productive capacity.

In the first place, labour power. Even in years of increasing production, there has been considerable unemployment in the United States, officially recorded as between 2 million and 3 million. There have been some 3 million in the forces—also out of production.

American official propaganda has made great play with the fact that, while there are millions unemployed and on short time, the number of workers employed has been increasing each year. If, however, the detailed statistics are examined, it becomes evident that the greater part of the

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increase has been not in actual production but in non-producing occupations. The *New York Times* of March 31st, 1957, records that:

> "For the first time in the nation's history, the number of people employed in the production of goods was fewer than the number employed in everything else—government, trade, services, finance, utilities, transportation."

The paper also notes that the number of goods-producers has only increased by 3 per cent since 1947, but they are "turning out today almost half again as much as in 1947. The reason for the rise in output is productivity. New machines enable each worker to turn out more each year than he did the year before."

The more the competition between the monopolies and the drive for maximum profit increases productivity, the greater the gap between production and purchasing power for the finished products, for articles of consumption.

But American capitalism's inability to use the country's full resources of labour power is only one side of it. It is equally unable to make continuous use of the great industrial machine it has built up. With a capacity of 9 million cars, only $6\frac{1}{2}$ million were produced in 1955; production of electric cookers and radiators was below half of capacity. Even in early 1957, when total production was higher than it had ever been, the output of major industrial materials and metals was 10 per cent below capacity; of textiles 20 per cent. In early May 1957 steel output was only 86 per cent of capacity, "reflecting mainly substantially smaller takings by the auto and other consumer durable industries" (*Federal Reserve Bulletin*).

To a growing extent in recent years, sales of durable consumer goods have depended on instalment credits, which rose from $17 billion in 1949 to $42 billion in 1956. This seems to have reached its limit.

In his January 1957 report to Congress, Eisenhower referred to the great expansion of "the nation's productive plant and equipment. . . . These outlays contain the promise of greater national output and better living in the years ahead". But they also contain the menace of over-production and crisis, in capitalist conditions. Moreover, Eisenhower added that "important advances in technology have improved the quality and efficiency of plant and equipment"—which means in practice that an even smaller part of the total labour force will be required.

Certainly the illusion that American monopoly capitalism has solved the difficulties of capitalism, whether by Keynesian techniques or otherwise, has no basis in reality.

In Britain the same factors have been at work, although the process has not gone so far as in the United States. Additions to productive capacity have been made on an increasing scale since 1953, including a certain amount of modernisation and automation. But the demand for articles of consumption has remained more or less stagnant; and the fact that output of machine tools exceeded new orders each month from July 1956 to March 1957, and that industrial construction is slowing down, may be an indication that the capital extension boom is coming to an end. Nor, in view of general conditions in the capitalist world, does it seem probable that there will be any considerable extension of exports—unless at least the restrictions on trade with the socialist countries are removed.

The United Nations *World Economy Survey* calls attention to the fact that prices all over the capitalist world have been rising, in spite of the relative stagnation in consumers' demand. It attributes this largely to devaluation in a number of countries. It does not mention that the grip of monopoly, and Government policy (as in Britain) have contributed to the rise in prices. It presents the facts as if the relative stagnation of consumers' demand is something that has happened accidentally, alongside high prices. In fact, however, stagnation in consumers' demand is largely *due* to the rise in prices, and to the increasing productivity of new plant (reducing the labour required for the same output) *financed by the monopolies through high prices.*

If consumers' demand has not actually fallen, this is due to the fight made by the workers to maintain their real wages in face of rising prices.

But the great expansion of productive capacity, with rising prices and rising production, cannot go on indefinitely while consumers' demand is relatively stagnant; in fact, wholesale prices have been falling recently. The contradiction may show itself in various ways, such as balance of payments difficulties, further devaluation, more acute conflicts between the monopolies in both home and foreign markets, and more acute class conflicts within the capitalist countries. The fight against the national liberation movement—as in France at the present time—may bring all economic difficulties to a head. In any case, the normal working of capitalist production itself has created a dangerous economic situation, which the various national policies of monopoly capitalism are only making worse.

Contributions based on the problems raised in this article or any other problem of the economic situation would be welcome.—EDITOR.

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The October Revolution and the British Labour Movement

Harry Pollitt

(This article appeared in the first issue of a new Soviet journal *Questions of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. The final section of the article has been omitted by us through lack of space, except for the last four paragraphs.—EDITOR.)

EVER since I can remember there has always been great sympathy in the British Labour movement with the heroic struggles of the Russian people against the tyranny and oppression of the tsardom.

I remember the great wave of sympathy aroused in Britain at the news of the Russian Revolution in January 1905, and also the impact on the developing Socialist movement in Britain of the presence of so many Russian revolutionary exiles, like Comrade Lenin, who worked and lived in London.

The news of the Russian Revolution in March 1917 was greeted with enthusiasm by the war-weary people of Britain, and by the Labour movement in particular. So much so, that in June 1917, the Independent Labour Party joined with the British Socialist Party in convening a conference at Leeds, bringing together representatives of Socialist groups, militant trade unionists and shop stewards.

The Leeds Conference

The Leeds Conference was attended by 1,150 delegates, including 371 from trade union and shop stewards' organisations, and 209 from Trades Councils and local Labour Parties: the rest were mainly from the Independent Labour Party and British Socialist Party.

Four resolutions were adopted. The first unanimously greeted the Russian Revolution; the second called for peace; the third called for the defence of civil liberties; and the fourth dealt with organisational questions.

The principal resolution adopted at this Leeds Conference read as follows:

> "This Conference of Labour, Socialist and democratic organisations of Great Britain hails the Russian Revolution. With gratitude and admiration it congratulates the Russian people upon a revolution which has overthrown a tyranny that resisted the intellectual and social development of Russia, which has removed the standing menace of an aggressive imperialism in Eastern Europe, and which has liberated the people of Russia for the great work of establishing their own political and economic freedom on a firm foundation, and of taking a foremost part in the international movement for working class emancipation from all forms of political, economic and imperialist oppression and exploitation."
>
> (*The Call*, June 7th, 1917)

A message was received at the Leeds Conference from the Petrograd Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies which was greeted with great enthusiasm, and which read:

> "The friendly Executive of the Soldiers' and Workmen's Deputies sends salutations and fraternal greetings to the Conference of Socialist and Workmen's Organisations at Leeds, and hopes to meet the representatives of the Leeds Conference between July 15th and 30th."

To this greeting the following reply was sent from the Leeds Conference:

> "The largest and greatest Convention of Labour, Socialist and democratic bodies held in Great Britain during this generation, has today endorsed Russia's declaration of foreign policy and has pledged itself to work through its newly constituted Workmen's and Soldiers' Council for an immediate democratic peace. The Convention received your telegram of congratulations with gratitude and enthusiasm."

It is very interesting in view of all that has happened since the Leeds Conference of 1917, to note the character of the final resolution adopted at this conference, and also to realise that, despite its character, some delegates thought that it did not go far enough.

The resolution was moved by W. C. Anderson, M.P., at that time a prominent leader of the Independent Labour Party, and read as follows:

> "This Conference calls upon the constituent bodies at once to establish in every town, urban and rural district, Councils of Workmen's and Soldiers' delegates for initiating and co-ordinating working

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class activity in support of the policy set out in the foregoing resolutions, and to work strenuously for a peace made by the peoples of the various countries, and for the complete political and economic emancipation of international labour . . . . . And further, that the convenors of this conference shall be appointed a Provisional Committee, whose duty shall be to assist the formation of local Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils and generally to give effect to the policy determined by this conference."

(*The Call*, June 6th, 1917)

A Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates of thirteen was set up. The task set the Council was to assist in the formation of such local councils all over the country, and, generally, to give effect to the policy decided by the Leeds Conference.

After October

Because of the absence of news and information from Russia, it was not easy to follow the developments which were taking place in Russia from March 1917 to October 1917. Then, of a sudden, the press announced that "a Bolshevik revolution had taken place in October 1917".

But there could be no mistaking the epoch-making character of this event, because of the ferocious hostility shown towards it by the capitalist press of Britain with the full support of many of the reactionary right-wing Labour leaders.

The majority of those who had welcomed the March revolution in Russia in 1917 had done so because they thought it would facilitate the reentry of Russia into the imperialist war, and also because they dreamed of it opening out wider opportunities for international capitalist penetration into Russia and the exploitation of all her great natural resources. Now they were under no further illusions, and they changed their attitude overnight.

I doubt whether the venom and hatred of the capitalists and all reactionary forces in Britain has ever been so marked and so pronounced as that shown towards the October Revolution.

A political blackout was organised against all news of what was taking place inside Soviet Russia. Only the most blood-curdling lies and slanders about Bolshevik "atrocities", the "nationalisation of women", the "Red Terror", the "destruction of all churches" etc. appeared in the press.

To their eternal credit two British writers, Phillips Price and Arthur Ransome, tried in the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily News* to give some objective account of what was taking place in Soviet Russia, and I recall, even at this distance of time, the concluding words of Arthur Ransome in one of his last dispatches written from Petrograd:

"No one contends that the Bolsheviks are angels. I ask only that men shall look through the fog of libel that surrounds them, and see that the ideal for which they are struggling, in the only way in which they can struggle, is among those lights which every man of young and honest heart sees before him somewhere on the road, and not among those other lights from which he resolutely turns away. These men who have made the Soviet Government in Russia, if they must fail, will fail with clean shields and clean hearts, having striven for an ideal which will live beyond them. Even if they fail, they will none the less have written a page of history more daring than any other which I can remember in the story of the human race. They are writing it amid showers of mud from all the meaner spirits in their country, in yours, and in my own. But when the thing is over, and their enemies have triumphed, the mud will vanish like black magic at noon, and that page will be as white as the snows of Russia, and the writing on it as bright as the gold domes that I used to see glittering in the sun when I looked from my windows in Petrograd.

"And when in after years men read that page, they will judge your country and mine, your race and mine, by the help or hindrance they gave to the writing of it."

(Extract from an article in *The New Republic*, U.S.A. May 1918, by Arthur Ransome, Correspondent in the Soviet Union for the *Manchester Guardian*.)

Within twenty-four hours of the October Revolution, Lenin announced the intention of the new Russian Government to open peace negotiations on the basis of "no annexations and no indemnities", but we, in Britain, did not know for some time that this proposal had been made.

On November 23rd, 1917, both *Pravda* and *Izvestia* started to publish selections from the secret treaties between the Entente Powers and the Tsarist Government.

And when on December 12th, 1917, the *Manchester Guardian* began to publish extracts from these secret treaties, a considerable wave of anger swept through the progressive and peace-loving forces in Britain at the hostile attitude of Lloyd George's Coalition Government towards the Russian Government.

There has always been in Britain a traditional hostility to secret treaties, and the revelations now coming out of Soviet Russia rapidly led to a stronger opposition to them than ever before.

The late Arthur Ponsonby, who, at that time, was a Liberal Member of Parliament, strongly denounced the Lloyd George Government in Parliament for ignoring the peace proposals of the Soviet Government in the light of what had now been disclosed as the real war aims of the British Government in alliance with Tsarist Russia. In the course of his speech in Parliament Ponsonby stated:

"You have prostituted the original and disinterested motives for which this country entered the war, and you have substituted for them a mean craving for vengeance and punishment, a sordid desire for gain, and an arrogant demand for imperial

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aggrandisement and domination, without the consent of the people, secretly and surreptitiously making declarations all the while which were deceitful and false."

All these developments certainly compelled the Labour Party to begin to consider drafting a statement of its own attitude to the war. From this arose the proposal of the Labour Party that an Allied Labour and Socialist Conference should be convened to consider their war aims. The Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress and the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party then issued an invitation to all labour and socialist bodies in the Allied countries to attend such a conference, and a special note was sent to the Soviet Government. In the course of this note it stated:

"In this crisis the British people must speak. They must proclaim to the peoples of Russia and Central Europe that their aims are identical with those of Russia, that we, too, see no solution for the evils of militarism except in the principles of no annexations or punitive indemnities, and the right of the peoples to determine their own destinies."

But Lenin, in my opinion correctly, refused to participate in such a one-sided conference, and replied in the following telegram:

"Russian Socialist Government regrets inability participate Allied Socialist Conference, as contrary to principles internationalism. We object to division of working class according to imperialist grouping. If British Labour agrees to Russian peace aims, which are already accepted by Socialist Parties Central Europe, such division still more unwarranted."

Nevertheless, in February 1918 a conference of the Inter-Allied Labour and Socialist movement was held in London, and did draw up its draft war aims, the essence of which was a demand for peace without annexations, indemnity or vindictiveness.

Riga, in the early years of Soviet Russia, became the central cesspool from which every capitalist newspaper did its foul work, just as Vienna took on the same role during the Hungarian events in 1956.

The only journals which consistently tried to give a correct picture of the meaning of the October Revolution and its international significance, especially for the workers of the world, were those published by the British Socialist Party (*The Call*), the Socialist Labour Party (*The Socialist*) and the Workers' Socialist Federation (*The Workers' Dreadnought*).

Armed Intervention

In 1918, a People's Russian Information Bureau was set up in London which did excellent work in disseminating reliable facts and information about what was happening in the Soviet Union though this could only be done on a very limited scale.

Then came the period of armed intervention against the young and struggling Soviet Union, with Winston Churchill as its chief protagonist so far as Britain was concerned. He openly boasted of his aim, "to crush the Bolshevik revolution", and also, later, that he had spent £100 million on the attempt.

In 1918-19 there was no Communist Party in Britain, only small, scattered and disunited bodies of revolutionary workers, but all of them were zealous in their defence of Soviet Russia and very energetic in their propaganda against armed intervention. All this work had its effect, and there were instances of British soldiers in 1919 demanding demobilisation and refusing to go and fight against Soviet Russia.

Later, when armed intervention was in full swing, copies of the appeals of the Bolshevik leaders distributed to the British soldiers and sailors inside Soviet Russia became available in Britain. They were reprinted by the revolutionary workers and distributed in the factories, labour organisations, streets, and inside and outside military depots.

I believe that on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution, it is well worth while quoting from some of these historical documents, for they make extraordinarily interesting reading and I am sure my readers will be struck, not only with the politics of the documents, but with their great simplicity of language and appeal.

In 1918 and 1919, an appeal was addressed to all British troops in the armies of allied intervention against the Russian Socialist Federative Republic (as it was called at that time) headed "Why Have you come to Murmansk?" It is an extraordinarily interesting document, and concluded as follows:

"Your landing in Murmansk is part of the scheme to co-operate with the Czecho-Slovaks.

"You will be fighting, not against enemies, but against working people like yourself.

"For the first time in history, the working people have got control of their country. The workers of all countries are striving to achieve this object. We in Russia have succeeded. We have thrown off the rule of the Tsar, of landlords and of capitalists. But we have still tremendous difficulties to overcome. We cannot build a new society in a day. We desire to be left alone.

"We ask you, are you going to help to crush us? To help to give Russia back to the landlords, the capitalists and the Tsar?

"You in your Trade Unions have been fighting capitalists. You know what it is.

"Comrades!

"Englishmen!

"You who pride yourselves on your love of liberty!

"Comrades! Descendants of the great Chartists! You who have always expressed sympathy with the Russian Revolution: are you going to assist in crushing the first effort of working people to free themselves from their sweaters and exploiters?

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"Remember this; if the Russian Revolution is crushed, then the power of the capitalists will be enormously strengthened in every country, and the fight for economic freedom will be put back for a hundred years.

N. LENIN,
President Council People's Commissaries.
G. TCHITCHERINE,
People's Commissary for Foreign Affairs."

Towards the end of 1918, Comrades Lenin and Tchitcherine addressed an appeal to all British soldiers and sailors serving in the British armed forces of intervention in Russia. This appeal was headed:

Are You a Trade Unionist?
An Appeal to British Workers.

The appeal concluded as follows:

OUR REVOLUTION

"We, the workers of Russia, in our fights with the capitalists have always taken this view. In October last we swept the capitalists out of power, and declared that Russia belongs to the whole of the Russian people.

"We are not going to grow food for the rich to feed, or weave cloth for the rich to wear. The people will enjoy the product of their labour.

"Can you wonder that the capitalists of all countries should hate us? We have shattered their dreams of the vast fortunes to be made out of the great stores of natural wealth contained in our country.

"Besides, if they allow us to remain in existence, will not the workers in other countries follow suit, and do as we have done?

"They have decided, therefore, to crush us before we have time to consolidate our position. And you, English trade unionists, will be used for this purpose.

"The Russian capitalists do not stand an earthly chance against us by themselves. But your capitalists know that their interests are the same as those of the Russian capitalists, and have come to their assistance.

"Why do you not recognise your class interest in the same way? You as trade unionists are fighting your capitalists: we have settled our account with ours.

"What are you going to do? Are you going to undo the work we have commenced? Are you going to do the dirty work of your enemies, the capitalist class? Or will you remain loyal to your own class—the working class—and support our effort to secure the world for labour?

REMEMBER

"By fighting us you are not fighting for your country, but for the capitalists whom your fellow trade unionists at home are fighting. By fighting us you are fighting your fellow workers. Every blow you strike against us is a blow against yourselves. If you crush us, you will only succeed in strengthening the power of your own capitalists to rob you and exploit you.

"Fellow workers, on whose side are you—the workers, or the masters?

N. LENIN,
President Council People's Commissaries.
G. TCHITCHERINE,
People's Commissary for Foreign Affairs."

On August 1st, 1918, an appeal was issued by the Russian Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Government: "TO THE TOILING MASSES OF FRANCE, BRITAIN, AMERICA, ITALY AND JAPAN." The following are some extracts from this appeal:

"Your entire capitalist Press is howling like a vicious, unleashed dog for your governments to intervene in Russian affairs. The hireling newspapers of your exploiters, shouting 'Now or Never', have dropped their masks and are openly clamouring for an advance against the workers and peasants of Russia. But even at this moment they lie unscrupulously, and shamelessly attempt to deceive you, for whilst they threaten intervention in Russian affairs, *they are already conducting military operations against the Russia of the workers and peasants.*

* * * *

"We are convinced that should we now reply with two blows for every blow dealt by the rapacious 'Allies', you will see in our action, not only legitimate self-defence, but the upholding of *your* interests as well as ours; for the preservation of the Russian Revolution is the common interest of the workers of all countries. We believe that every measure we may take against those who, on Russian territory, are hatching plots against the Russian Revolution, will have your sympathy, for such plots are directed against you, as well as against us.

"Driven to fight Allied capitalism, which desires to add new fetters to those imposed upon us by German Imperialism, we address ourselves to you, our fellow workers.

"Long Live the Solidarity of the Workers of the World!

"Long Live the Solidarity of the Working People of France, England, America and Italy with the working people of Russia!

"Down with the Bandits of International Imperialism!

"Long Live the International Revolution!

"In the name of the Soviet of the People's Commissaries,

President of the Soviet of the People's Commissaries—V. ULIANOFF (LENIN)
People's Commissary for Foreign Affairs—G. TCHITCHERINE."

The following is a copy of a leaflet distributed to British soldiers in Baku on May 1st, 1919. We reproduce it just as it was printed at the time and with the English uncorrected:

"Comerads British Soldiers!

"We congratulate you with great international workmen holiday—the First of May. Today for workmen of all parts of world is great holiday.

"Comerads, soldiers of British troops!

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"The great war of imperialists continu 5 years finished, and now people of all countries struggle against its own government and against rich classes. The first who has destroyed the power of its government and rich class is Russian workmen and peasants. They call now workmen of all world to go against all the kings all the rich class.

"Germany, Austria followed our example. Workmen of these countries have no more imperialistic government. They have Consils of workmen, peasant and soldiers deputies.

"Great battle between imperialistic rich class and peasants began.

"With Russian workmen, workmen of England, Germany, France, Austria, America, you must call today

"Behind international imperialism!
"Be a life revolution of workmen!
"Be a life third international of Communism!
"Be a life of general union of Soviet Republic of world!
"Be a life British Socialistis Republic!
"Be a life the Russian Bolshevik Party
COMITEE OF RUSSIAN
COMMUNIST PARTY OF BAKU."

British Solidarity

Despite all the difficulties that arose from the continuation of the imperialist war and lack of information, among the class-conscious workers sympathy with the October Revolution and interest in its development was growing stronger in Britain.

One could feel this in an ever greater degree, and, with the end of the imperialist war in November 1918, it became clear that there would be a new upsurge developing throughout the whole Labour movement, despite all the alleged "victory feelings" and the results of the "Hang the Kaiser" and "Make Germany Pay" General Election of December 1918. In passing, it is interesting to note that it was in December 1918 that the Labour Party adopted its first Socialist Constitution and the principle of individual membership.

The storm broke in January 1918, and great unofficial strikes broke out all over the country, and especially in Glasgow, London, Belfast and Southampton.

On January 18th, 1919, there was held in the Memorial Hall, London, a National "Hands Off Russia" Conference convened by the London Workers' Committee Movement, the British Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party and the Industrial Workers of the World. It was attended by 350 delegates.

The following resolution was moved by Harry Pollitt representing the Openshaw Branch of the British Socialist Party, and seconded by R. Barker of the Herald League:

"This rank and file conference of delegates from British and Irish Labour and Socialist organisations resolves to declare a general strike and to adopt every method of agitation upon every field of social activity to begin on (date to be fixed by the conference) unless by that date the immediate and unconditional cessation of Allied intervention in Russia—either directly by force of arms, or indirectly by an economic blockade, by supplying arms, money or other sinister means, to internal opponents of the Bolshevik administration shall have been officially announced, and to continue the struggle and agitation until the desired announcement shall have been made and until we are satisfied of the truth of the announcement."

An amendment to this resolution was moved by T. L. Smith of the Workers' International Industrial Union of Glasgow and seconded by Arthur McManus of the Clyde Workers' Committee. A further amendment was moved by Sylvia Pankhurst on behalf of the Workers' Socialist Federation, to the effect that we also demand the withdrawal of troops from Germany.

After an interesting discussion, the following resolution was adopted by an overwhelming majority:

"This rank and file conference of delegates from British and Irish Labour and Socialist organisations hereby resolves to carry on an active agitation upon every field of activity to solidify the Labour movement in Great Britain for the purpose of declaring at a further conference to be convened for the purpose, a general strike unless before the date of that conference the unconditional cessation of Allied intervention—either directly by the force of arms, indirectly by an economic blockade, by supplying arms or money to the internal opponents of the Bolshevists, or by any other sinister means endeavouring to crush the Bolshevik administration—shall have been officially announced, and to continue the strike and agitation until the desired announcement shall have been made, until we are satisfied as to the truth of the announcement, and until the Allied attack on the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils in Germany are stopped, the blockade raised and the Allied troops withdrawn."

A committee of fifteen was elected to carry on the organising work, and a further resolution demanding facilities from the Government to proceed to Russia to enable delegates to obtain first-hand knowledge of the internal conditions.

The call was also made to form "Hands Off Russia" committees all over Great Britain.

The nation-wide campaign conducted around the slogan of "Hands Off Russia" created a deep impression throughout the Labour movement. It also had other important political consequences. It led to a closer understanding between the revolutionary workers who were organised in many parties. The desire for unity between these parties grew. Inside the Independent Labour Party there was also a growing ferment arising out of the developments

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in the young Soviet Russia. When the news came to Britain about the formation of the Third International (Communist International), many voices were raised inside the revolutionary organisations and also inside the Independent Labour Party for these bodies to affiliate to the Third International. At the Glasgow Conference of the Independent Labour Party in 1920, it was only the intrigues of Ramsay Macdonald that prevented the Independent Labour Party from taking such a step.

But the main preoccupation was to stop armed intervention against the Soviet Union. This was all the more urgent because of the serious difficulties with which Soviet Russia was confronted, having to fight on eleven fronts, as well as to combat the activities of the counter-revolutionaries within the country.

When the news of the fall of Kiev came through in May 1920, there were many heavy hearts in the Labour movement. Equally there was great rejoicing in the capitalist camp. On May 10th, *The Times* exultingly wrote:

> "The fall of Kiev is a great triumph for the Poles and their Ukrainian allies, as it is a heavy blow for the Bolsheviks. The city was entered, according to the Russian wireless on Friday, after heavy fighting during Thursday and that day, and by the latest reports, the Russians are in retreat, followed by Polish cavalry. King George expresses the traditional feelings of the British people when he conveys to Marshal Pilsudsky on the occasion of the Polish National Festival their 'most cordial congratulations and good wishes for the future of the Polish State'."
>
> (*The Times*, May 10th, 1920)

Councils of Action

But *The Times* rejoiced too soon. On May 10th, 1920, the London dockers refused to load the s.s. *Jolly George* with munitions for Poland to be used against Soviet Russia. A wave of joy swept the whole Labour movement. This strike started a mass movement which grew in strength week by week, until on August 9th, 1920, the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress were forced by the weight of feeling inside the Labour movement to call an emergency National Conference to consider what action to take to bring the policy of British armed intervention against Soviet Russia to an immediate end.

This conference was a remarkable success. It set up a National Council of Action, and passed a resolution which stated:

> "It therefore warns the Government that the whole industrial power of the organised workers will be used to defeat this war" (i.e. the war upon Russia).

Following the Conference, 350 local Councils of Action were set up covering every important industrial centre. Preparations were made for strike action. The Government was forced to surrender and end its war of armed intervention against Soviet Russia. Comrade Lenin, commenting upon these events, stated:

> "This Council of Action, independently of Parliament, presents an ultimatum to the Government in the name of the workers—it is the transition to the workers' dictatorship—The whole of the English bourgeois press wrote that the Councils of Action were Soviets. And it was right. They were not called Soviets, but in fact they were."

These events had their effect, as Lloyd George has testified, on the Allied International Conference which was taking place at Hythe in 1920, but it was no less a person than Churchill himself who had to place on record the full effects of the actions of the Labour movement in foiling his dastardly plans against Soviet Russia. Churchill wrote:

> "The British Labour Party had developed a violent agitation against any British assistance being given to Poland. . . . Councils of action were being formed in many parts of Britain. Nowhere among the public was there the slightest comprehension of the evils which would follow a British collapse. Under these pressures Mr. Lloyd George was constrained to advise the Polish Government that the Russian terms do no violence to the ethnographical frontiers of Poland as an independent state and that if they were rejected, the British Government could not take any action against Russia."
>
> (*The World Crisis—The Aftermath*, page 269, by Winston Churchill)

During 1920 negotiations continued for the creation of the united Communist Party in Britain. There were many obstacles to be overcome as very sharp differences existed, in particular between the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party, the two principal revolutionary parties in Britain.

An impetus towards forming such a Party undoubtedly sprang from the October Revolution and lessons of the successful struggle for power on the part of the Russian workers and peasants, which had taken place under the leadership of the Bolsheviks. The many discussions which took place between British comrades representing the various sections of the revolutionary movement and Comrade Lenin in particular, also had a great influence in increasing the determination to see that, despite all the difficulties, a united Communist Party should be formed.

The main differences which existed were on such questions as the attitude towards participation in Parliament; whether the Communist Party, when formed, should apply for affiliation to the Labour Party or not; the respective merits of political versus industrial action.

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Finally, in London on July 31st to August 1st, 1920, the British Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party, South Wales Socialist Society, groups of the Workers' Socialist Federation and a number of independent Socialist Societies took part in a united conference. The Communist Party of Great Britain was founded, and soon became affiliated to the Communist International.

Later, various groups and branches of the Independent Labour Party joined the Communist Party, and so, for the first time in the history of the British Labour movement, there was established a united revolutionary political party of a new type, based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

With the end of the period of armed intervention an agitation developed in Britain for the diplomatic recognition of Soviet Russia by the British Government, and in particular for the establishment of trading relations with Soviet Russia. All sections of the Labour movement were drawn into this political activity, which received a great stimulus through the work of the "Hands Off Russia" movement.

Various delegations from Britain had visited the Soviet Union, and all their reports of what they had seen and what were their impressions were discussed with great thoroughness by large sections of workers. What I think was an important turning point in the relations between the Soviet Union and Great Britain was the report of the official delegation of the General Council of the Trades Union Congress issued on return from the Soviet Union in 1924. It was a comprehensive, factual report, which aroused enormous interest throughout the Labour movement, and gave added influence to the demands both for diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union and for trading relations with it.

During the period of the first Labour Government in 1924, the Soviet Union was officially recognised, and this established a new page in the relations between the two countries, although the Tory diehards never ceased to campaign against the Soviet Union, and we saw the results of this campaign, for instance, in the infamous raid on Arcos by the Tory Government in 1927, which aroused a storm of protest from the Labour movement.

In May 1926, there was a General Strike in Britain which lasted for nine days in support of the miners' fight against a drastic worsening of their conditions. This magnificent demonstration of working class solidarity was betrayed by the right-wing Labour leaders, but the miners continued their resistance alone for many months afterwards. They received many expressions of international solidarity, but the greatest assistance came from the workers of the Soviet Union, who donated £1,250,000 for the relief of the sufferings of the British miners and their families. This splendid demonstration of the Russian workers took place at the time when the then Tory Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, had made an appeal to the United States not to send any financial assistance to the British miners. For this reason the action of the Russian workers was all the more appreciated, especially as the miners were fully aware of the great sacrifice it must have meant to their Russian comrades who were themselves facing such acute economic problems.

* * * *

Today, when the peace policy of the Soviet Union and its consistent desire for peaceful coexistence stand out like a beacon light for all the peoples of the world to see, and as the fear of an atomic war grips the people, more and more the realisation is growing that Britain and the Soviet Union must stand together and set an example to the whole world. We are certain that if this were the case, then there would be no nation, nor combination of nations, in the world that would dare to foment another world war.

The Fortieth Anniversary of the great October Revolution will undoubtedly be the occasion not only to celebrate the astounding triumphs that stand to the credit of the first socialist nation in the world, one which is now on the road to communism, but will intensify the efforts of all people of good will in Britain in general, and in the Labour movement in particular, to secure a closer understanding between the British and Soviet peoples.

We are confident that at the next General Election the Tory Government will be decisively defeated, that a Labour Government will be returned, and that the mass movement will insist that one of its first essential tasks should be to promote a lasting peace and friendship between Britain and the Soviet Union.

We believe that if we in the Communist Party in Britain set the example in the way we explain the lessons of the October Revolution and all the gigantic constructive achievements which have flowed from it, that once again the enthusiasm which once stopped Britain making war upon the Soviet Union can be recaptured, so that our two great nations shall live in peace for ever, and our two great Labour movements will help to strengthen the international solidarity of the workers of the world.

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English Blake

Arnold Kettle

WILLIAM BLAKE, the greatest revolutionary poet Britain has known, was born on November 28th, 1757. His bicentenary is being celebrated this year by progressive people everywhere.

> The Whore & Gambler, by the State
> Licenc'd, build that Nation's Fate.
> The Harlot's cry from Street to Street
> Shall weave Old England's winding Sheet.
> The Winner's Shout, the Loser's Curse,
> Dance before dead England's Hearse.
> Every Night & every Morn
> Some to Misery are Born.
> Every Morn & every Night
> Some are Born to sweet delight.
> Some are Born to sweet delight,
> Some are Born to Endless Night.

Blake has been at different times represented by the bourgeoisie as a seditious criminal, a harmless mystic and a far-gone madman. It was the same during his life. In 1804 at the Quarter Sessions at Chichester

> "William Blake, an engraver at Felpham, was tried on a charge exhibited against him by two soldiers for having uttered seditious and treasonable expressions . . ."

He was opposed to the war of intervention against the young French Republic. Many humane and idealistic young men of the time had welcomed the French Revolution; most of them, understandably enough, with the declaration of war against France, the wave of repression at home and, above all, the news of the Terror from across the Channel, abandoned or drastically modified their early sympathy. But Blake continued to wear in his hat the tricolour of Republican France.

They have presented him, those who live and think within the orbit of the class he hated, as an all but incomprehensible mystic, his head in the clouds and his feet nowhere in particular. The case for such an interpretation contains of course some plausible evidence; at a superficial glance it can be pretty convincing. For did not Blake write and literally believe that angels guided his pen? Did he not produce and illustrate numerous Prophetic Books, compact of an esoteric or private mythology of the greatest complexity and often obscurity? And have not scholars of indisputable eminence and with the most formidable apparatus of research and quotation linked his beliefs with almost every mystical and occult system under the sun—from ancient Hindu philosophy to neo-Platonism and ancient Irish mythology?

But Blake himself never used the word mystic. And it is as difficult to work out a consistent interpretation of the Prophetic Books as a whole as it is to interpret the Bible without contradictions. The truth seems to be that Blake, like his greatest successor W. B. Yeats, soaked himself in all kinds of esoteric thought and experiment and *used* such experiences for his own purposes. The question as to how far or precisely in what sense he believed some of his ideas and visions to be true is a very complex one. Perhaps we may get a hint of the answer from Yeats's emphasis on the poetic image—"the mind's eye Fixed upon images that once were thought". The poetic image is—above all—concrete; never abstract. Blake, who did not use the word mystic but sometimes called himself a visionary, searched always for *concrete* expressions of his perceptions of life. The Canadian critic, Northrop Frye, has put it this way: "A visionary creates or dwells in a . . . world in which the objects of perception in this one have become transfigured and charged with a new intensity . . . It is a perceptive rather than a contemplative attitude of mind." I do not wish to enter into deeper discussion of these questions; but I mention them because we shall not honour Blake by pretending that his work does not raise difficult problems or by making him out to be something other than he was.

And yet the simple and decisive answer to those who insist on seeing Blake as a mystic and refuse to recognise the down-to-earth material basis of his art is, of course, the impact of his poems themselves. To turn especially to the *Songs of Experience* and to pause in particular on the poems London, Holy Thursday, The Chimney Sweeper, The Nurse's Song, The Little Vagabond, should be enough to convince anyone without further ado that not only were the visionary's feet firm on the ground but his head a great deal harder than those of most of his interpreters.

> Pity would be no more
> If we did not make somebody Poor;
> And Mercy no more could be
> If all were as happy as we . . .

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The difficulty many readers have with a poem which begins with such lines is really only the difficulty of believing their eyes and ears. Certainly it is an unusual statement, but only because it is unusually true. And notice the absence of beating about the bush: in an earlier draft Blake had written

Pity *could* be no more [my italics]

But a repeated "could" would make the poem a little abstract, a bit theoretical. Blake's perception was of the world as it exists; he was a visionary in the sense that he did not *accept* the world statically but saw its changes and its possibilities. Without such a vision he might, like any other clear-sighted artisan of the day, have seen realistically the London of the Industrial Revolution as it was; but he would have lacked the living indignation which yields the unforgettable intensity of the last verse of *London*:

But most through midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new born Infant's tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

The plagues of this terrible yet unspeakably moving poem are not metaphysical plagues. And if one wants an illustration of what Yeats meant by "images that once were thought" one could not have a better example than that final image of the marriage hearse in which a dozen *ideas* about prostitution, venereal disease, bourgeois weddings, funeral customs etc. are contained within and made real and concrete by one poetic image of immense power.

Some of his enemies called him mad. Blake was well aware of that tactic and its significance. In one of his great rhetorical passages he makes his hero Milton exhort Albion

To cast aside from Poetry all that is not Inspiration,
That it no longer shall dare to mock with the aspersion of Madness
Cast on the Inspired by the tame high finishers of paltry Blots
Indefinite, or paltry Rhymes, or paltry Harmonies,
Who creep into State Government like a catterpillar to destroy . . .

And, more simply, with a reasonableness which many of his critics have notably lacked:

> "Those who have been told that my works are but an unscientific and irregular Eccentricity, a Madman's Scrawls, I demand of them to do me the justice to examine before they decide."

* * *

Let us make, necessarily very briefly, such an examination.

Blake, living through the establishment of modern industrial capitalism in England and the American and French Revolutions abroad, is, to an astonishing degree, a modern man: no other artist of his time felt so clearly, so deeply, the central tensions and possibilities of the new era.

He saw life as struggle. "Opposition", he wrote, "is true friendship." And: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence."

He saw the essence of this dialectical process as the struggle in every living thing and person and situation between the negative, inhibiting, decaying, death-bearing forces which he called the Spectre, and the positive, potential, energetic, life-carrying forces which he called the Emanation. Within every man and every society the new divine joyful Emanation carries on a continuous war against the cunning and seductive Spectre. It is not in the orthodox religious sense a fight between God and the Devil or good and evil, because neither the Spectre nor the Emanation is thought of as absolute or static.

My Spectre around me night & day
Like a Wild beast guards my way.
My Emanation far within
Weeps incessantly for my Sin.

But the Emanation does far more than weep.

Each Man is in his Spectre's power
Until the arrival of that hour
When his Humanity awake
And cast his own Spectre into the Lake.

Humanity is Blake's most persistent positive. Milton comes to aid Albion "To bathe in the Waters of life, to wash off the Not Human". But Blake is far too tough a thinker to leave Humanity as a vague wishy-washy concept, a veil to cover idealism, with all the grotesque, high-minded inhumanity that idealism brings. His work is a continuous effort to express and define and hence help Humanity in specific, particular, concrete forms. Man is divine, but he is human: nothing can be gained from idealisation or absolute-mongering. Therefore to express "A Divine Image" he must write

Cruelty has a Human Heart,
And Jealousy a Human Face;
Terror the Human Form Divine,
And Secrecy the Human Dress.

The Human Dress is forged Iron,
The Human Form is a fiery Forge,
The Human Face a Furnace seal'd,
The Human Heart its hungry Gorge.

Such a poem has an extraordinary, two-way, back-and-forth relevance. It reminds us that men are cruel and jealous, not good and bad or milk and water; but it says at the time that men have invented cruelty and jealousy, and therefore

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implicitly leaves their control an open question. Every time Blake uses an abstract noun like cruelty or pity the reader (lulled as we still are by centuries of idealism) must beware, for he will always turn the table on static thinking and the consolations of liberalism. His awareness of the "mind-forged manacles" of unrealism—which he specifically associates with the purposes of the ruling class—is so deep, so pervasive, that he teaches us as we experience his poems to think and feel dialectically.

So when Blake writes a poem about love it is a paradox.

"Love seeketh not Itself to please,
Nor for itself hath any care,
But for another gives its ease,
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair."

So sung a little Clod of Clay
Trodden with the cattle's feet,
But a Pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet:

"Love seeketh only Self to please,
To bind another to Its delight,
Joys in another's loss of ease,
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite."

Which is right, the clod or the pebble? On which side is Blake himself? To put the question in such a way is to betray our own preferences for non-materialist, non-dialectical thinking and to miss the very point that Blake is concerned to make. "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" he writes, and our first instinct is doubt because we have got used to the fact that One Law for the Rich and another for the Poor is also Oppression. But both statements are true and Blake helps us to see why.

* * *

It will now perhaps be clear why Blake, the revolutionary, hated and attacked the most revolutionary bourgeois thinkers of the eighteenth century, including some of those who helped to prepare for the French Revolution.

Mock on, Mock on Voltaire, Rousseau:
Mock on, Mock on: 'tis all in vain!
You throw the sand against the wind,
And the wind blows it back again . . .

The Atoms of Democritus
And Newton's Particles of light
Are sands upon the Red sea shore,
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright.

Blake's attack on eighteenth-century philosophy is in fact an attack on mechanistic thinking. And if in the course of the offensive he sometimes seems to be attacking reason itself this is due to the strength of his hatred of "false reason", associated in his mind not only with the mechanical materialism of the natural scientists but, more persistently, with the eighteenth-century Church. It is in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that he gives perhaps his deepest thoughts on this question:

"Energy is the only Life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
"Energy is Eternal Delight."

He saw class society, fortified by the ideology of the State Church, as suppressing and destroying the energies and aspirations of men and women. And he understood very well the nature of exploitation:

The Beggar's Rags, fluttering in Air,
Does to Rags the Heavens tear.
The Soldier, arm'd with Sword and Gun,
Palsied strikes the Summer's Sun.
The poor Man's Farthing is worth more
Than all the Gold on Afric's Shore.
One Mite wrung from the Labrer's hands
Shall buy & sell the Miser's Lands:
Or, if protected from on high,
Does that whole Nation sell & buy.

The Whore and the Gambler are revealed in this poem, *Auguries of Innocence,* as the symbols of bourgeois society, the expressions in personal and public life of the essence and consequences of acquisitive society. Blake's purpose here is not that of the preacher, the ineffectual moralist who calls on men to turn from their wickedness, but the profounder purpose of laying bare the basis of people's actions and morals.

The Church he saw as aiding and abetting in the business of keeping the people in chains. "Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion." And Blake the Christian is never more bitter and powerful than when he is expressing his feelings about priests who "are binding with briars my joys and desires". The wonderful poem *A Little Boy Lost,* typical in its intense economy of effect and the ungarnished directness of its final line, is one of the most striking expressions of this theme.

"Nought loves another as itself,
Nor venerates another so,
Nor is it possible to Thought
A greater than itself to know:

And Father, how can I love you
Or any of my brothers more?
I love you like the little bird
That picks up crumbs around the door."

The Priest sat by and heard the child,
In trembling zeal he siez'd his hair:
He led him by his little coat,
And all admir'd the Priestly care.

And standing on the altar high,
"Lo! what a fiend is here!" said he,

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"One who sets reason up for judge
Of our most holy Mystery."

The weeping child could not be heard,
The weeping parents wept in vain;
They strip'd him to his little shirt,
And bound him in an iron chain;

And burn'd him in a holy place,
Where many had been burn'd before:
The weeping parents wept in vain.
Are such things done on Albion's shore?

Many times Blake returns to the theme of sexual frustration in class society. Because he saw clearly that what matter in life are not abstract moral systems but human relationships, and because he knew that human relationships are social relationships and that the battle of ideas is a class struggle, he does not treat social morality in any kind of isolation or abstraction. So that when he says (using the kind of shock tactics he delighted in):

In a wife I would desire
What in whores is always found—
The lineaments of gratified desire.

he is not defending prostitution, any more than when he says "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" he is recommending infanticide. One of his most bitter criticisms of the Church is based on its attitude towards sex, and this is given most remarkable expression in a poem the significance of which has only in this century become clear and discussable.

I saw a chapel all of gold
That none did dare to enter in,
And many weeping stood without,
Weeping, mourning, worshipping.

I saw a serpent rise between
The white pillars of the door,
And he forc'd & forc'd & forc'd,
Down the golden hinges tore.

And along the pavement sweet,
Set with pearls and rubies bright,
All his slimy length he drew,
Till upon the altar white

Vomiting his poison out
On the bread & on the wine.
So I turn'd into a sty
And laid me down among the swine.

Again, the main problem with this poem is simply that of believing one's eyes and ears, so direct and even shocking is the imagery. It is a poem, of course, about the Church and the degradation of sexual relationships. The Church is feared by and isolated from the people, and its association with gold is not fortuitous. On the one side of the picture is the golden church, on the other the pigsty. And into this picture bursts the terrible image of the serpent, traditional symbol of evil and at the same time of the phallus. The image is at once extremely direct and very complex. The violation represents at the same time the desecration of Christianity by the Church and the desecration of sexual relationships by state religion. And compared to this combination of loot and rape the pigsty is clean. Right through the eighteenth century honest courageous artists like Fielding and Swift and Hogarth and Gay had painted with realism and compassion the condition of the people, the sordid degradation of Gin Lane, in a society which called itself civilised. It remained for Blake to put himself unequivocally on the side of the Yahoos, to find a deeper humanity in the swinish underworld than in the urbane civilisation of the ruling class.

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night
In the howling storm

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

The rose is a rose, with the scent and colour and texture of a rose; and it is also Blake's world, a sick society, corrupted by its spectre, eaten away by false feeling and false ideas based on false relationships.

He was able to see as he did partly because he was himself an artisan, an engraver, who worked for his living throughout his life and fought all along the line the battle of the engravers for artistic and economic recognition. Caught between the old system of aristocratic patronage and the new bourgeois relationships in which art was merely another market commodity, Blake fought a long and hard-headed battle for a decent status for the artist in society, rejecting the ideas of patronage and of the artist as "above" society.

"Liberality," he cried, "We want not Liberality! We want a Fair Price & Proportionate Value & a General Demand for Art."

But we cannot "explain" Blake in such terms, though they help us to understand him. It is doubtful whether we shall be able to explain in a scientific kind of way why a particular artist is able to express something of life with an intensity that makes our hair stand on end and allows us to see and feel what we had not seen before.

* * *

I propose to end this article with a discussion of a poem of Blake's which seems to me of exceptional interest and ought to be better known

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"Let the Brothels of Paris be opened
With many an alluring dance
To awake the Pestilence thro' the city,"
Said the beautiful Queen of France.

The King awoke on his couch of gold,
As soon as he heard these tidings told:
"Arise & come, both fife & drum,
And the Famine shall eat both crust and crumb."

Then he swore a great & solemn oath:
"To kill the people I am loth,
But if they rebel, they must go to hell:
They shall have a Priest & a passing bell."

Then old Nobodaddy aloft
Farted & belch'd & cough'd,
And said "I love hanging & drawing & quartering
Every bit as well as war & slaughtering.
Damn praying & singing,
Unless they will bring in
The blood of ten thousand by fighting or
swinging."

The Queen of France just touched this Globe,
And the Pestilence darted from her robe;
But our good Queen quite grows to the ground,
And a great many suckers grow all around.

Fayette beside King Lewis stood;
He saw him sign his hand;
And soon he saw the famine rage
About the fruitful land.

Fayette beheld the Queen to smile
And wink her lovely eye;
And soon he saw the pestilence
From street to street to fly.

Fayette beheld the King and Queen
In tears & iron bound;
But mute Fayette wept tear for tear,
And guarded them around.

Fayette, Fayette, thou'rt bought & sold,
And sold is thy happy morrow;
Thou gavest the tears of Pity away
In exchange for the tears of sorrow.

Who will exchange his own fire side
For the steps of another's door?
Who will exchange his wheaten loaf
For the links of a dungeon floor?

O, who would smile on the wintry seas,
& Pity the stormy roar?
Or who will exchange his new-born child
For the dog at the wintry door?

[*The remainder of this article consists of some pages written in* 1948. *I have resisted the temptation to make a number of topical changes and have left them exactly as I wrote them nine years ago—A. K.*]

This odd and beautiful poem, which doesn't generally find its way into the anthologies (partly, no doubt because of old Nobodaddy's human but inelegant behaviour), seems to me one of the few great revolutionary poems in the English language. It was written about 1793 at a time when it was even more difficult and unpopular to support in public the French Revolution than it is today to express outright support of the Soviet Union. But it is by no means merely as a gallant statement of political sympathy that it deserves attention. *Cris de coeur,* for all their individual poignancy, are ten a penny; stirring battle songs of the class struggle (like the Chartist poetry) are splendid expressions of the human spirit, but as literature they rely on intention and occasion rather than on actual achievement. This poem of Blake's is something different; its greatness is that it helps us to get our feelings straight not only about the French Revolution but about all revolutions. It is not its subject-matter but itself that helps and moves us.

The symbolic representation of the causes and course of the revolution is of course no more than the prelude, a "setting" for Blake's purpose. Yet how striking and how adequate the symbols are and how vigorous and immediate the language in the opening stanzas! Tinselled prostitution, disease and hunger set against the beauty and luxury of the court; the idiocy as well as the inhumanity of the King wonderfully struck by the simple words, crude rhythm and fatuous, ding-dong rhymes. Blake isn't saying that this is the whole truth about the revolution, the nursery-rhyme suggestion of those first stanzas precludes that; but the over-simplification is intentional and in no way weakens the essential force of the symbols; quite the opposite in fact.

Nobodaddy is an old friend, Urizen "Father of Jealousy". Blake's devils are frequently associated with the gods whom the conventional and complacent worship, the gods of the ruling class, of all the destroyers of Jerusalem. Nobodaddy's association with the priest and passing bell and the juxtaposition of false religion, torture, war and autocracy are no accidents. These are Blake's horrors. The vigour of Nobodaddy, distressing as it may be to the puritans, comes from the fact that Blake identifies him with his own flesh and blood enemies of the ruling class. He is no anaemic Mephistopheles dealing in Sin and Guilt and Error (those question-begging abstractions of our latter-day mystics) but a hearty devil living on the fat of the land, a super-exploiter who knows perfectly well which side his bread is buttered and by whom and with what.

The last two lines of the fifth verse, for all their topical point, are perhaps the least satisfactory in the poem and their weakness is underlined for the modern reader by the difficulty of divesting the word suckers of its more vivid contemporary associations, but in any case the sudden reference

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to the English queen is not quite in harmony with the general conception of the poem and, though it stresses the topicality and in a sense the universality of the subject, the loss (through dispersal of interest and lessening of intensity) is on the whole greater than the gain. Blake's own attempts to amend these two lines shows that he was conscious of their weakness. One rejected version runs:

> But the bloodthirsty people across the water
> Will not submit to the gibbet & halter

—a nice dig at the tone of the reactionary propaganda of the time; but again not quite relevant to the central core of the poem.

It is the final six stanzas that form the core of the poem and give it its remarkable value. Having presented his symbolic picture of the revolution Blake now expresses the peculiar point or significance with which he is concerned, for the subject of this poem is not the revolution as such but the adequacy or otherwise of certain attitudes to it. What Blake is doing, as I have already suggested, is getting his feelings—and therefore ours—straight.

Lafayette's position is clearly and concretely shown. He has seen the causes of the revolution, recognised the responsibility of the rulers. But when the day of reckoning comes he loses sight of the total question, the full human situation and sees only the pathos of the king and queen in "tears and iron bound". It is a recurring problem, a central, agonising doubt which in every revolutionary period must beset especially those on the fringes of the struggle—the middle class, the intellectuals—and of which we today must be particularly conscious. For Lafayette is every high-minded humanitarian of every revolution. He is Koestler's hero who wills the end but cannot will the means. He is Victor Gollancz who gives away to the German ex-Nazi the tears that first belong to the Czech anti-Nazi. He is those who could not distinguish Finland from Spain. He is, if we are honest, very many of us when we are on the spot, finding it easier to condemn at a distance than to accept the difficult but necessary responsibilities of harsh action.

Blake resolves the problem of Lafayette and of us, and he resolves it through his poetry. He resolves it with supreme moral certainty in his condemnation of Lafayette and with supreme humanity in his understanding.

(Version B)

> Fayette, Fayette, thou'rt bought & sold,
> And sold is thy happy morrow;
> Thou gavest the tears of Pity away
> In exchange for the tears of sorrow.

It is wonderfully instructive, once again, to examine Blake's emendations. This stanza, as it originally stood, read:

(Version A)

> Fayette, Fayette, thou'rt bought & sold
> For well I see thy tears
> Of Pity are exchanged for those
> Of selfish, slavish fears.

This is much clearer, morally and intellectually, than the revised version—and demonstrates, incidentally, the acuteness of Blake's political understanding; he saw without illusion that Lafayette's betrayal of the revolution was in the last analysis due to his own class position, to his fears, not his humanitarianism. But it is not poetry of the same level as version B. The reason, I think, is that while A is an intellectual statement (introduced and weakened by the all-too-logical word "for"). B is a resolution *in fully human terms* of the *whole* problem and conflict, which is not merely intellectual and cannot therefore be adequately resolved in merely intellectual terms.

In the preceding verse Blake deleted the word "curses" in favour of the word "tears", so that originally the lines read:

> Fayette beheld the King & Queen
> In curses & iron bound

Again the change is significant. The original version is very powerful and has the advantage of the great force of the image "bound in curses", a tremendous concept. Why did Blake change it? For precisely the same reason, I think, as the other revision. "Curses" is stronger, "tears"—in that context—more fully human. For by introduring the king's and queen's tears Blake deliberately weights the scales, so to speak, against an easy solution. For the king and queen *are* pathetic, Lafayette's temptation is a real temptation. It is inadequate to dismiss him (or our latter-day renegades) *just* as a traitor. The full pity of the situation is that it is not the stupid but the sincere who most betray. And so, by his emendations, which appear at first glance to weaken the class-consciousness, the enormous power and clarity of his vision—Blake does in fact strengthen his poem by strengthening the conflict within it, deepening the tension, encompassing more of the truth about what revolutions are.

The final resolution of the poem comes in the last two verses: variations on the same theme and stated in the form of four questions. In four sets of images—three of them containing contrasts based on the already stated theme of exchange (i.e. the exchange through revolution of a new society for an old)—the full "meaning" of the poem is pressed into our consciousness. The

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method is the opposite of abstract argument. To make his point Blake presents us with the simplest possible material images; the issues are removed from the realm of complex moral abstractions to that of basic human choices. The homely yet powerful images pile up in our mind so that we understand better than before what the class struggle, in all its simplicity and infinite complexity, its pity and terror and its final hard-gained people's triumph, is. And we feel on our pulses the abysmal black fatuity of the man who pities the stormy roar. In short, this is a great revolutionary poem because it deepens our feelings about the class struggle and, thus changing us, makes us better able to cope with our own world and its problems.

(N.B. All quotations are from the Nonesuch edition of Blake)

Philosophy, criticism and progress

Maurice Cornforth

(This article is based on a paper on *The Social Responsibility of Philosophy*, presented to the Warsaw Conference of the International Institute of Philosophy in July 1957.)

THE purpose of this article is to do no more than some "thinking aloud" about the nature of philosophy and what we, the people, may expect to gain from it. I begin by assuming that philosophy is not entirely useless. It does something, it investigates something. What does it do, what does it investigate, what is its subject-matter?

What is Philosophy?

As regards subject-matter, my first suggestion is perhaps rather startling. It is, that philosophy has *no* subject-matter—or at least, none in the sense that the special sciences have subject-matters. That is to say, there is no special part, department or aspect of reality which is the special subject-matter of philosophy, so that one could distinguish philosophy from other enquiries by saying: philosophy investigates *this*, while those other enquiries investigate *that* and *that*. . . . For instance, you can say that the subject-matter of physics is physical processes, of chemistry chemical processes, of sociology social processes, and so on with other sciences. But there is nothing similarly marked out as the subject-matter of philosophy.

Philosophy has subject-matter in a different sense. Not that it investigates any particular part or aspect of reality, but that it tries *to answer certain kinds of questions*, which may relate to any part or aspect of reality. The subject-matter of philosophy should be defined in terms of the kinds of questions philosophers try to answer.

What are these questions? I do not think one can define them by making a list of them, for philosophy has not always been about the same questions. I think that what chiefly characterises philosophical questions is that they all spring from a certain kind of *criticism* of current ideas.

In the seventeenth century the great French philosopher Descartes said that in order to do philosophy it was first necessary *to doubt everything*. When he said this he was, it seems to me, stating in a rather sharp and exaggerated way a universal truth about philosophy. Only if people doubt and question does philosophy begin, and if they ever stop doubting and questioning then philosophy ends.

Something of the sort was also suggested by Hegel, in his lectures on the history of philosophy, when he said (though, as was usual with him, in a rather obscure and sententious way) that the philosophy of the time puts all the assumptions of the time in question, that "freedom of thought" is the first condition of philosophy, and that therefore "philosophy only appears where and in so far as free institutions are formed".

And certainly, if someone merely repeats doctrines handed down by authority, without questioning them or trying to justify or modify them in any way through criticism, then we would hardly say he was contributing to philosophy. Take the case of the middle ages, for instance. Hidebound as some medieval philosophers were (though since I have studied them a little I have come to think them less hidebound than they are often represented), what gives them the title of philosophers is that they did not merely repeat the dogmas of the Church but raised all kinds of questions about them.

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So if philosophy questions and criticises, what does it question and criticise?

This is very hard to define exactly. I can only suggest a very vague and inexact definition, by saying that it questions and criticises *the general assumptions underlying the current ideologies of society*—that is to say, underlying traditionally accepted and handed-down views about the universe and human life and destiny (the whole diffuse complex of collective views, sentiments and attitudes which are held to be proper in a given society and are passed on and spread about through such agencies as the family, the school, the church, the state etc.); and also underlying current "common sense".

The questions of philosophy are thus questions raised from *the criticism of tradition and common sense*. The constructive outcome of philosophy is then the critical formulation of a "world view" or "world outlook". But this world view or world outlook is not in fact constructed by philosophers by some method of *a priori* reasoning or some special kind of philosophical investigation, but is constructed by them as a product of their *criticism* of the traditional and common-sense ideas of their time.

From this it follows that in different periods philosophy asks different questions. For the source of the questions is something which changes greatly from period to period—and one of the things which causes it to change is philosophy itself, as an effect of the very questions it raises.

The point was well made by the late R. G. Collingwood (Professor of Metaphysics at Oxford) that it is wrong to treat the history of philosophy as the history of a series of *different answers* to *the same questions*. In fact philosophy passes from one set of questions to different questions—though, of course, the different questions are always related, if only because philosophy itself passes into the "tradition" and so, as it gets under way, becomes largely concerned with self-criticism and in that way is self-perpetuating.

The Criticism of Metaphysics

An important development in modern philosophy is the tendency to pass away from what are now often called "metaphysical" questions. It is one thing to recognise that "metaphysical" questions are becoming outmoded, another to give an exact definition of what is a "metaphysical" question. I suggest that the main criterion of a "metaphysical" question is that it is about what is "ultimate". Metaphysical philosophy is about "the ultimate" —about "being as being", "the absolute", the "ultimate constituents of the world" and so on.

The words "the ultimate", or "ultimate reality", which metaphysical philosophy is concerned with, are very hard to define. I shall try to convey their meaning in an example. Reading this, you are looking at a piece of paper, and perhaps you will ask: "What is this paper made of?" To this a paper manufacturer will reply: "It is made of wood-pulp". Then you ask a chemist what the wood-pulp is made of, and he will tell you it is made of certain combinations of chemical atoms. Then you consult a physicist, who will tell you how the atoms are built up out of electrons spinning round a nucleus. Much more than that you cannot find out, owing to the present limitations of sub-atomic science. Having thus exhausted scientific enquiry, you may then consult the metaphysicians, who will speak to you in a very different way. They will tell you that none of the technicians or scientists has even touched on the great question of what a piece of paper is "really" or "ultimately" made of. And as to that, each metaphysician will give you a different answer. One may tell you: "It is made of Matter". Another will say, "No, that's gross materialism—it is really a collection of sense-data in your mind." Another will say: "This piece of paper is simply a passing modification of the One Absolute Substance". And so on. You will notice two things about the metaphysicians. One is that they cannot agree amongst themselves. The other is, that each has somehow made up his theory out of his own head and, unlike the scientist, has no method to suggest of checking or verifying his theory, of carrying out any practical investigation or test in its favour.

So metaphysical questions about "the ultimate" or "ultimate reality" are distinguished from practical or scientific questions by this, that there is and can be no practical way of checking or verifying the answers.

Now asking metaphysical questions has lately come in for well-merited criticism on the grounds that it is senseless to ask questions of which you cannot check the answers. For this reason, some critics of metaphysics have tended to treat the whole of past philosophy as merely a big blunder; and this blunder has further been regarded as chiefly due to misunderstandings about the uses of language. I think, however, that there is a good deal more to be said on that score, and I want to suggest that asking metaphysical questions is linked with certain social conditions and the discrediting of metaphysical questions with a change in those social conditions.

One factor which evidently has a bearing on asking or not asking metaphysical questions is the development of science and technology. Philosophy has been driven from the attempt by answering metaphysical questions to work out philosophical systems revealing the "ultimate" nature of the world, since while philosophers were vainly trying to correct current ideologies by penetrating the secrets of the universe by speculation, genuine

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knowledge was being amassed piecemeal by the work of the sciences. The success of the scientific explanation of separate parts and aspects of the world has tended to discredit the asking of metaphysical questions. (In the example I gave above, you would be less inclined to turn away from the speculations of the metaphysicians had you not received such detailed and practical information from the scientists.)

Engels was amongst those who first stated this fact and drew conclusions from it about the questions of philosophy. "That which still survives, independently, of all earlier philosophy", he wrote, "is the science of thought and its laws—formal logic and dialectics. Everything else is subsumed in the positive science of nature and history." Later, other philosophers began independently to reach comparable conclusions—though while they had an area of agreement with Engels about the questions of philosophy, the answers they began to work out were different from his. Thus, for example, Bertrand Russell wrote that "the classical philosophy" believed "that *a priori* reasoning could reveal otherwise undiscoverable secrets about the universe", whereas now it should be recognised that "logic is the essence of philosophy".

Yet while the sciences have played and continue to play this role in discrediting metaphysics, I do not think one can simply say that metaphysics must go because the sciences should take its place. The sciences do not in fact answer the questions which metaphysics asks. They ask and answer different questions, being not in the least concerned with anything metaphysically "ultimate". Hence, with the discoveries of the sciences, metaphysical questions are still asked, relating to those discoveries themselves. The question is asked: "What is the ultimate reality which constitutes the subject-matter of the sciences, and aspects of which they describe in terms of scientific concepts?" This question is asked even by critics of metaphysics like Bertrand Russell, and all manner of metaphysical answers are suggested—such as that the ultimate reality, or the ultimate subject-matter of the sciences, consists of "sense data" or "sense contents". The modern subjective idealist philosophy of Positivism provides, indeed, a good example of a thoroughly metaphysical philosophy.

I want to suggest that the reason why philosophy has for so long asked metaphysical questions, and continues to do so, despite all the criticisms of metaphysics, lies in some very fundamental cause persisting throughout the manifold changes in the structure of society; and that this cause is to be sought in the human condition which Marx in his earlier philosophical writings called "alienation", and certain aspects of which he later dealt with in detail in *Capital*.

The Marxist concept of "alienation" is an obscure and difficult one, and even were I able to provide an exact analysis and definition (which I am not) there would not be space for it here. I think that, briefly and roughly, its meaning is as follows. People coming together in society create conditions for themselves independent of their will in such a way that their own creations, which they created involuntarily and unconsciously (by a kind of necessity and yet for the sake of their own livelihood), come to dominate them like an alien force. One example of such "alienation" is the way in which, producing their products as commodities, people become dominated by their own products; and Marx paid some attention to this example in his analysis of "the fetishism of commodities" in Book I of *Capital*. But that is only one example of a widespread and persistent fact which has always played a major part in social affairs and, in particular, in the formation of ideological illusions and modes of false consciousness of all kinds.

According to Marx, the modern development of large-scale industry, bringing the socialisation of production and the formation of the modern working class, is at last creating conditions where it is possible to achieve a socialist order of society in which gradually all human creations can be brought under people's own conscious control—in which, as Engels put it, "the whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man and have hitherto ruled man, comes under the dominion and control of man, who . . . has become master of his own social organisation." The time is therefore ripe for overcoming the age-old condition of alienation, with its various attendant miseries and illusions. Indeed, to overcome it is the whole task and aim of socialism.

It seems to me that the persistent asking of metaphysical questions may well be closely connected with the fact that philosophers have been living in an alienated society. The metaphysical idea of "the ultimate" (which, by the way, is in its origins closely bound up with religion) is an expression of the sense that man and society are dominated and bound by something unseen and intangible yet infinitely powerful and inescapable—the ultimate mystery which no technique and no science can master. So in trying to criticise and to understand, philosophers have been led to reason about this "ultimate" which presses upon the thoughts and feelings of men—not realising that it is in fact only the shadow of conditions which men have unwittingly created for themselves.

If the discovery of the "ultimate" now begins to seem to us beside the point, that is not simply because it is ruled out by the development of science—on the contrary, that development alone does not rule it out. It is because the development of science and technique and of social organisation itself is

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creating possibilities for human progress for the exploitation of which the old metaphysical conundrums are totally irrelevant. Hence the turn of criticism against metaphysics, and the discrediting of metaphysics.

As Engels has pointed out, if metaphysical questions are not asked, then a large area of what once took the form of questions of philosophy is superseded by scientific investigation. Scientific investigation of nature and society takes the place of metaphysical questioning concerning the ultimate constituents of nature or the ultimate basis of human society. And so for the illusory certainties of metaphysics are substituted the provisional but empirically based and tested generalisations of the sciences.

The questions that remain for non-metaphysical philosophy are not questions in any way concerned with the discovery of the characteristics of what exists—whether of the "material world", "ultimate reality", "the mind", or any other sphere of real or imaginary existence. Of course, discoveries about what exists may be and are extremely relevant to answering non-metaphysical questions of philosophy. But properly *philosophical* questions are concerned not with *existence* but with *thought*—with the forms of thought and its categories, the ways to use and develop them and the criticism of their aberrations. So the philosophical criticism of the current tradition and common sense does not take the form of reasoning about "the ultimate", but about *the categories, laws and validity of our own thought.*

Philosophy and the Class Struggle

What I have called the ideological "tradition", with its associated "common sense", is a part of the social superstructure—a complex of views, sentiments and attitudes which, as Marx showed, is formed on the basis of given relations of production, given forms of property and class divisions, and, on the whole, helps to consolidate and conserve the social structure on the basis of which it was formed.

If, then, philosophy arises from criticising and questioning the tradition, this must be due in the first place to the existence of a certain instability in the social relations and a tendency for them to be changed in various ways—otherwise such questions and criticisms would not arise. And in its net effect, the critical activity of philosophy operates in two ways. Some philosophers ask and answer questions in such a way as, on the whole, to *reinstate* and *reinforce* the tradition and common sense of their time; while other philosophers tend to *undermine* that tradition and common sense and to help lay the foundations for a *new* tradition and common sense.

So by its very nature philosophy, as a critical mode of thought, tends to divide into *conservative* and *revolutionary* camps—the former acting to conserve (perhaps with various modifications which, in the existing state of instability, serve to strengthen) the existing system of social relations which gave rise to the tradition; and the latter to replace it.

I think it is important, however, to emphasise that this is a *tendency* to division and not always an absolute division. Philosophical propositions once launched into the world tend to act in a conservative or revolutionary way; but the complications of life and changing society are such that in many cases they may act in both ways at once: in some respects acting to undermine the tradition, they may in other respects act to conserve it, and vice versa.

Now so long as people have lived in a condition of alienation (and that is ever since human life began, since alienation is primitive, preceding the division of society into classes) they have harboured in their minds illusions about their condition, taking the form of belief in supernatural and superhuman agencies of various sorts. Such beliefs have always been ingredients in both the tradition and the associated common sense of society (belief in the supernatural has not only been propagated by medicine men and priests: it has always seemed to most people to be sheer common sense to believe that they are surrounded and overlooked by supernatural beings). From the start, therefore, philosophical criticism has been concerned with these beliefs, in part reinstating them in more systematised, rational and logical forms, and in part opposing them. Hence there has also arisen the perpetual conflict of two trends in the *content* of philosophical ideas—called in Marxist terminology the conflict between *idealism* and *materialism.* This division within philosophy between idealism and materialism is closely associated (though not identical) with the tendency of philosophy to act in a conservative or revolutionary way

So long as philosophy is concerned largely with metaphysical questions, the opposition of materialism to idealism takes a metaphysical form. Thus in opposition to *idealist* views which characterise the "ultimate reality" as ideal or spiritual, there have been *materialist* views which say that the "ultimate reality" is matter. If we are now criticising metaphysics, that does not imply, as some such critics (namely, the so-called Positivist philosophers) have thought, that the opposition of materialism to idealism has been superseded. The word "matter" should no longer be used to denote the "ultimate reality" or the "stuff" or "substance" from which everything is supposed to be formed. But the concept retains its validity in the context of the distinction between "matter" and "mind", or

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"material" and "ideal"—that is to say, of the distinction between what exists and what is thought, between objective reality and our ideas, feelings, desires and purposes. Materialism is no longer put forward by Marxists (or perhaps I should say, *should* no longer be put forward) as a metaphysical answer to a metaphysical question, but as the mode of approach to answering non-metaphysical questions. Thus if we are discussing logical questions, materialism means that we are concerned with the laws whereby, as Marx put it, "the material world is translated into forms of thought"; or if we are discussing social questions and questions of value and purpose, we are concerned with basing and justifying our ideas on the knowledge of the actual conditions and needs of mankind.

Philosophers, then, ask questions arising from a context of social instability; and their answers, materialist or idealist in general content, are in social effect conservative or revolutionary. This means further that in doing philosophy they cannot but be playing a certain part in the class struggles characteristic of their society. They in fact bring their influence to the support of one or other of the contending classes, the conflict between whose material, economic interests is at once the consequence of the given social-economic system and the main force bringing about its modification and change.

In this way the controversies of philosophy constitute an element in the class struggle. The views of philosophers, from the very circumstances in which those views are formed in their minds, contribute to the struggle of one or other class; they become formative elements in class ideology. And they are conditioned and bounded by the material interests and actual possibilities of enquiry and formulation of views and aims characteristic of the various classes.

What does this imply about the immediate present?

Class conflicts are certainly a feature of the period in which we are living. And they have reached the point where the world is divided into different social systems: the new system of socialist economy, the outcome of the modern conflict, has already been established over a large territory. That being so, amid the many controversies in philosophy it is impossible to evade a fundamental one, between the philosophical criticism which in effect attacks the whole tradition of the older, capitalist order and works to create the new tradition of socialist society, and the opposite criticism. What is further characteristic of the socialist philosophy at the present time is that its concern is not only, as in the fairly recent past, to attack capitalist ideology and put forward socialist ideas, but to work towards creating the tradition of a socialist system actually in process of formation. This naturally raises many new problems, and old problems in new ways.

In these circumstances, I think it perhaps specially worth emphasising that philosophy is *criticism.* Deep divisions exist; but setting aside those "philosophers" who are mere dogmatists and apologists, they exist between tendencies of critical enquiry. And so it seems possible to suggest that the more philosophers can join together, not in agreement about the answers to questions (which is hardly to be anticipated), but in exchanging questions and critically examining, and reshaping and developing, the ideologies of our time, the more will they actually contribute to the progress of mankind. As for socialist ideology, if it is true that it is the advancing point of human thought then it has got to keep advancing. A condition for this is that it is able continually to subject its own propositions to the review of a free and uninhibited criticism, which aims at the most logically consistent, clear and well-reasoned statement and at testing every point in the light of the experience and needs of the movement. And this advance is also likely to be the surer and more fertile the more, in developing the principles of socialism, Socialists are aware of and draw conclusions from all the critical questioning of the philosophy of our time.

Philosophy and Progress

The Marxist view that philosophy has a class basis and is an element in class struggle is often held to be derogatory to philosophy. Does it imply that all that any philosophy can achieve is to formulate the biased views of some class, which can have a value for that class only? I do not think so.

Marx's proposition that history is the history of class struggles does not imply that all that happens in history is that from time to time one class delivers a blow against another. *Progress* takes place, marked by such things as increase of productive power, increase of knowledge, and development of those ways of life embraced under the terms "civilisation" and "culture". Marx's proposition implies that all this does not happen independently of class struggles but *through* class struggles. A historian can therefore not merely report what happened, and assign to the best of his ability the causes why it happened, but can also assess the various historical actions (including the publication of philosophical works, for this is a historical action) not solely in terms of how they promoted some particular class interest but of how they promoted *general human progress.*

I think philosophy not only can contribute to human progress, but has actually done so and will continue to do so. But it does so only as an element in class struggle. The contribution which a philosopher makes is made through his associa-

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tion with some class. But in the first place, that association is of an active, creative kind—for a philosopher does not merely repeat and systematise the already spontaneously-formed beliefs and aims of a class, but by the questions he asks and the criticism he makes helps form those beliefs and aims, which could not take the shape they do otherwise. And in the second place, a philosopher's contribution may *transcend class interests* in the narrow sense. It may not be exhausted by ideas which do no more than serve the particular interests of a particular class at a particular time (though some philosophical ideas do no more than this), but may also include ideas which serve and in their development continue to serve the *general* interests of human progress.

But what can we mean by "progress"? If the word is to express more than merely certain personal or group preferences, then we should specify certain factors by the change of which progress can, roughly at least, be checked and measured.

How can we *measure* general human progress?

Some might wish to measure it in terms of "happiness" or "well-being", say; but I doubt if such concepts yield measures of a kind which would determine whether progress had happened or not. I want to suggest that the *measure* of the general progress of society is *the growth of productive technique and knowledge*. If, for example, mankind has progressed from the stone age to the present day, the *fact* of progress and its *distance* is *measured* by the movement from crude stone tools to modern instruments of production, and from almost complete ignorance to fairly extensive knowledge. Again, if one asserts that, say, capitalism is progress on feudalism, and socialism on capitalism, then whether this is true or false is *tested* by whether the capitalist relations give more scope for technique and knowledge to increase than the feudal relations did, and the socialist relations more scope than the capitalist. In this sense, progress is not a matter of opinion or preference, but of *ascertainable fact*.

However, while it may be suggested that technique and knowledge provide the *objective basis* and *measure* of progress, I do not think one can suggest that these concepts *exhaust* what we mean when we speak of progress, not merely as something which happens and can be measured but as something *desirable* to strive for.

Thus it may be said: "Yes, increase of technique and knowledge may be progress, but what we are most interested in is how this technique and knowledge are going to be used. Are we progressing in our capacity to make a good use of progress?" Or again, Socialists may be told: "Your system may indeed favour technical and scientific progress, but we still cannot consider it desirable if this progress is only obtained at the price of liberty and happiness."

What evidently counts is not technique and knowledge in themselves, but *the way of life* they enable people *to enjoy*. And here we are beginning to speak of things which *cannot* be measured, and to introduce *moral* rather than *factual* considerations.

I think we are now near to a definition of the use and social responsibility of philosophy, of what people may hope to gain from it. Through its social effect and influence, philosophy has a definite bearing on the attainment or non-attainment of progress. I think we should say that its use and responsibility is *to help progress*—but not only in the sense of aiding those forces which are actually developing technique and knowledge by working out critical ideas which help in that task, but also in the further sense of contributing to *the formulation and realisation of a way of life* by which people use, benefit from and enjoy the fruits of progress.

Philosophy and Human Purpose

I want to conclude with some observations about the kind of contribution philosophy makes, or can make, to human progress.

Philosophy makes no discoveries about either particular or general facts, and no inventions. So clearly it makes no *direct* contribution of any kind to the development of technique and knowledge. But it can now make an important indirect contribution—and this the more surely the more it frees itself from metaphysics—by clearing up questions about the *criteria of knowledge*, the *methods* of gaining it and the principles of its *application*. It can contribute, however, something more, in so far as it also attempts to clear up questions about the criteria of a good life and the methods of achieving and living it. In so far as it does this, philosophy contributes to progress also by dealing with *the ends which we try to make our material progress serve*, and helping to formulate the *purposes* which by our material progress may be realised.

Understood in this way, the fact of material progress cannot but give rise to the need for philosophy, and to properly philosophical questions and discussion. The full meaning of human progress can only be defined in philosophical terms ; people cannot set their social purposes before themselves without critical philosophical ideas; and those purposes cannot be striven for and still less be realised without the guidance of critical philosophical discussion.

Of course, social purposes do not *originate* from philosophical thought. I said above that philosophy "helps to formulate" them. And this indeed is an outcome of the philosophical criticism of

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current tradition from which philosophical questions arise.

At any time, the existing level of technique and knowledge, to which corresponds a system of economy and class relations, leads to the formation of specific class interests and limited possibilities of social action and achievement. It is from these interests and possibilities that social ideas of purpose arise, and philosophy can do no more than criticise, clarify and logically elaborate them. For human purposes are at all times related to people's actual conditions, interests and possibilities.

In its metaphysical phase, philosophy tries to formulate, fix and justify viewpoints corresponding to temporary historical conditions in terms of metaphysical conceptions of the "ultimate" and "absolute". That in part accounts for the contrast between the certainty and permanence which metaphysical systems claim for themselves and their actual dubiety and impermanence. When philosophers come to criticise metaphysics, then the critical philosophical discussion of problems of "thought and its laws" can not only help clarify the methods of advancing and applying knowledge, but also the methods of formulating and justifying purposes—not in terms of metaphysical theories, but of considering the *actual conditions* of human life and the *needs* arising from them.

The formulation and discussion of philosophical questions is always an intricate task, for which various highly specialised terminologies and methods of discussion are elaborated. From this there arises an ever-present tendency for specialised "schools" of philosophy to be formed, which engage in debate on a narrowing range of special philosophical questions divorced from the wider problems facing society. The outcome is usually that the schools are not so much formally refuted as in practice superseded. Philosophy needs to be and actually is continually renewed and revived by awareness of the problems facing society as a whole, and the effort to ask philosophical questions in such a way as to contribute to solving those problems. Apart from this, it cannot make the kind of contribution which people can claim that it should make to human progress.

Philosophy should not, therefore, be a specialised, separate pursuit, but be integrated with other social instrumentalities of progress. Of especial importance, it seems to me, is its relationship with art, science and politics. Aesthetics, the philosophy of science and political philosophy have long been recognised departments of philosophical study. But what should be the outcome of these studies? Not simply to discuss and clarify what is meant by "beauty" or "artistic form", by "scientific method", or by "the state"; but to discuss and clarify how these various things serve or can be made to serve social purposes. The outcome of philosophy would then be to help make these and other social activities themselves "philosophical", in the sense of contributing to their awareness of *what they are doing and what they are aiming at*. (It is sometimes said, for example, that Communists make philosophy subservient to politics. But the aim of Marxist philosophy would be better described by saying that it seeks to make our politics philosophical.)

It follows that philosophy has today not only to tackle questions of broadly a "logical" kind, as was originally suggested from the criticism of metaphysics, but also and finally questions of "value". These are not metaphysical questions, in the sense of trying to define the "ultimate" or "absolute" good, though they have been and still are put as metaphysical questions. They are questions of *the formulation of human purposes*.

Thus as a product of philosophical criticism and of philosophical questions about the laws of thought should come the discussion and clarification of *the relations of ends and means in human life*, and of the basis and justification of the ends we put before ourselves and the means we use to seek them.

I think we stand in need of such discussion at the present day. For example, it may be worth making clear that both parties and states are means and not ends, what are the ends for which they are required, and how they can be made to serve those ends. This is an example of philosophical criticism.

Such discussion requires careful enquiry about facts, but it is philosophical and links up with all the contemporary questions of philosophy. However it may become engrossed with special questions, philosophy cannot evade its responsibility of criticising all current ideology in order to formulate an outlook concerning the ends of human life and the means to achieve them.

Marxism is, I believe, just such an outlook; and it needs to be developed as such. Marxist philosophy is not just a system of such propositions as: "Matter is prior to mind . . . . . Everything changes and develops and is related to everything else . . . . . Quantitative changes give rise to qualitative changes . . . . . All processes consist of a unity of big and small contradictions . . . . ." If that is how we understood Marxist philosophy then we would hardly understand it at all, and would turn it into a mere system of metaphysics, reducing its propositions to abstract rules and dogmas. Marxism is not such a system, but a living and critical mode of thought, which strives, by constant criticism and enquiry, to develop a method of understanding the world and ourselves so as to change the world in accordance with our needs.

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Soviet economists discuss political economy textbook

(The following are some extracts from a longer summary which appeared in the *Proceedings of the Moscow University*—Section: *Economics, Philosophy and Law*. No. 2, 1956.

The translation has been made from a German translation which appeared in *Sowjetwissenschaft*, July 1957.

Space has prevented us summarising all the contributions made in the discussion. The English translation of the second edition of the Political Economy Textbook has been published by Lawrence and Wishart, price 21s.)

IN May 1956 a joint discussion on the second edition of the Political Economy Textbook was held between the Faculty of Political Economy of the Moscow State University and the Faculties of Political Economy and Social Science of other institutes.

The meeting was opened by a short statement from Academician *K. V. Ostrovitianov*. He stated that the first and second editions of the textbook had on the whole been favourably received by the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Congress, creatively developing Marxist-Leninist theory, had also elaborated a number of new principles and had demanded a re-examination of certain mistaken theoretical conclusions which had their origin in the cult of personality. As a result, historians, philosophers, economists, students of law, and workers in many other fields as well as the authors of the textbook were faced with a whole number of new, complex questions. The new edition of the textbook would have to meet the high demands which the Twentieth Congress made on the social sciences in general and on political economy in particular. These new and heavy tasks could only be solved by drawing in the widest circles and enlisting their co-operation.

A lively discussion followed.

Dr. A. W. Bachurin raised objections to that section of the textbook which dealt with the transition period from capitalism to socialism. In his opinion, the chapters in question contained too much emphasis on questions of the history of political economy and of economic policy, whilst the main problems of political economy were either relegated to second place or not properly treated. Thus the special features of the rise of socialist production, as well as the main features and laws of economic development in the period of transition were not elaborated sufficiently clearly.

Bachurin considered that the existence of two forms of property were insufficient justification for explaining commodity production under socialism. The character of social labour in the period of socialist construction is also a factor. One was also led, Bachurin stated, to question Stalin's conclusion that the means of production are not commodities under socialism. From the standpoint of Marxist-Leninist economic theory, it is difficult to understand how means of production can have value but at the same time not be commodities. Such a naturalistic interpretation was already rejected by Marx himself. According to Bachurin, the means of production are commodities also under socialism. Certainly they are commodities of a special kind, clearly differentiated from means of consumption, which are commodities in the fullest sense of the word. But, despite this, the means of production are real commodities, not just things decked out with the "appearance" of commodities.

Caused by the cult of personality and in contradiction to the logical and convincing arguments of Marx, the textbook denies that there is a division of the product into necessary and surplus product under socialism. Such a division continues to exist even though in socialism it expresses different relations of production. It is true that the definition of surplus product is changed—now it is a product for society and not for the exploiting classes.

Dr. Gluchkov was concerned mainly with questions of modern capitalism. He agreed with the authors of the textbook that the law of surplus value is the basic economic law of capitalism, but considered that the operation of this law under monopoly capitalism was not explained in a sufficiently concrete way. It is true that surplus value is the general foundation for monopoly profit, but, in addition to this, it is necessary to show that the monopolies have other, different,

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additional sources and methods for securing super-profits.

There is much that is unclear in the textbook in relation to how the laws discovered by Marx in his examination of capitalism in its pre-monopoly stage operate in modern capitalism. This applies especially with regard to the law of the tendency of falling rate of profit; for here there is a failure to show that with the increase in the organic composition of capital in monopoly capitalism, the degree of exploitation is most strikingly increased. When the capitalists invest in fixed capital they face the danger that their rate of profits will very steeply fall. However, this is compensated for by the fact that the exploitation of the working class is intensified. The increase in the rate of exploitation in modern capitalism is an important factor moderating and hindering the fall in the rate of profit. A further countering factor, not mentioned in the textbook, is that of state monopoly capitalism, as a result of which the monopolies acquire fantastic wealth through their utilisation of the apparatus of the state. The textbook fails to deal with the export of capital, which also holds up the fall in the rate of profit. The result is that the law of the tendency of falling rate of profit and its operation in modern capitalism are treated very slightly in the textbook.

A good point about the textbook is that it examines the two tendencies in technical development which appear under imperialism. However, though the authors recognise an industrial advance under imperialism, they limit this to those branches of industry which are concerned with armaments production and thus they remain standing halfway, for technique also advances in other branches of production under the pressure of competition. Though the textbook correctly shows that technical advance takes place under imperialism, it does not elaborate these points. It is also absolutely essential to draw attention to the contradictions which accompany this process.

Gluchkov suggested that the law of the uneven development of capitalism—economic and political—in the epoch of imperialism be given much more attention in later editions of the textbook. This question cannot be separated from the many and varied forms of transition from capitalism to socialism in different countries, for this reason the law should be examined in a more fundamental and comprehensive way. In doing this, there should be no one-sided concentration on uneven economic development, but due attention should also be paid to uneven political development. In the second edition of the textbook only one aspect of uneven political development is treated, i.e. the class struggle; other important aspects like the national liberation struggle and the anti-Fascist struggle and the peace movement are not even mentioned.

Professor S. B. Lif criticised the structure of the section in the textbook that dealt with the capitalist mode of production. He drew attention to a number of incorrect formulations in the textbook. For example the textbook stated: "The *maximum limit* of wages under capitalism is the value of labour." One cannot agree with such a conclusion put so categorically. Wages are extremely elastic. In certain phases of the industrial cycle they can very much exceed the value of labour power. Certainly this is of very short duration. The fact that successful class struggle by the proletariat can also force an increase of wages should not be overlooked either.

In treating the problems of imperialism we should stop using the term "maximum profit". Lenin speaks of monopoly profit or monopoly super-profit. And not without reason. The concept "maximum profit" expresses only the quantitative side of this phenomenon; it draws attention to the fact that it is considerably above the average profit. But the concept *monopoly profit* or *monopoly super-profit*, on the other hand, provides us not only with a quantitative but also with a qualitative concept. It immediately conveys the relation between monopoly profit and the domination of the monopolies. Moreover, maximum profit and monopoly profit are in no sense synonymous terms. Lenin regarded monopoly profit as one of the varieties of profit, profit amassed by monopoly capital. Stalin, on the other hand, really equates maximum profits with surplus value, as profit necessary for ensuring extended reproduction. There is no reason for such a jumbling together of monopoly profit and surplus value.

In the textbook there is also no real elaboration of the economic foundations of state monopoly capitalism. All that is said is that state monopoly capitalism means the utilisation of the state apparatus by monopoly capital. This is, of course, correct, but it is not all. What is involved—from the economic standpoint—in the subordination of the state by the monopolies? Lenin defines as one of the foundations of its development the personal union of monopoly capital and the government, in which monopoly capital is the decisive factor. From this it also becomes clear how the monopolies are in a position to harness the state for their own interests.

Dr. N. S. Spiridinova opposed the view that the means of production were commodities under

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socialism. In this connection she recalled a statement made by Lenin in 1920 that state products, the products of state enterprises, exchanged for food produced by peasants, are not commodities in the politico-economic sense of the term, in any case are not only commodities, are no longer commodities, have already ceased to be commodities (Lenin, *Works,* Vol. 32, Russian edition). This statement of Lenin's also has validity to the entire period of the first stage of communism, especially in regard to the means of production. Considered correctly the means of production are seen to be no longer commodities. The transition from commodity to product proceeds not at one blow, but by a series of leaps. True, this dialectical process of development from commodity to non-commodity signifies that the means of production still have value as the measure of labour embodied in them. They still have the value form, and appear in the form of commodities. Value here does not express the relations between different classes, but has already lost a number of specific features, for beneath the utilisation of the old form the commodity gradually grows into the product. The fact that the means of production retain the commodity form and are paid for in money is not just a game, but is of considerable importance for the economy.

N. W. Chessin dealt with the meaning and the content of basic economic laws. In his opinion, the introduction of the category—basic economic law—to economic practice must be ascribed exclusively to Stalin. Marx, Engels and Lenin, the classical exponents of Marxism-Leninism, did not venture to deduce a basic law from a series of other laws. Chessin argued that one should not concern oneself with the idea of how to improve the formulation of basic economic laws, but rather with the question as to whether the elaboration of such a category is justified scientifically at all. The construction of a basic law out of several other laws, and having the content ascribed to it by Stalin, contradicts Marxist dialectics.

By a basic economic law Stalin understood a law that determines all the most important sides and processes of development, and consequently all that is most essential in a mode of production. The authors of the textbook use the word "expresses" instead of "determines" in various places. This alteration is absolutely correct, for an economic law can only *express* and not *determine* this or that aspect of relations within the relations of production. It is not an economic law which makes possible the rise of a definite system of production relations, but, on the contrary, the production relations which give rise to economic laws. However, despite this correction, the authors have plumped for the idea that amongst all the laws there is *one* which expresses what is most essential in the mode of production.

We are faced here with a wrong conclusion. The essence of the mode of production cannot be confined within the framework of *one* law. Every law reflects only one single side, one aspect, one essential feature; it does not, however, embrace the essence in its totality. The real inner essence of such a complicated organism is a mode of production, which can only be expressed by all the economic laws taken together. Although Stalin sought to find *one* law which expressed the essence of a mode of production, he only brought confusion into economic theory and also into economic practice as a result. According to Stalin, the law of value as the law of commodity production had no connection with the essence of capitalism. For Marx, Engels and Lenin on the contrary, capitalism without commodity production was unthinkable; for them it was precisely commodity production which is the basis of capitalism, and without the law of value there could have been no law of surplus value.

Influenced by the cult of personality the authors of the textbook have taken pains to formulate basic laws for the various modes of production. The inevitable result was that the formulation of the basic law of a mode of production had to contain all the main features of the corresponding production relations. This could not be avoided, for the essence of a mode of production cannot be adequately defined by reference to a single feature. For this it is necessary to describe all the important features. An exception is made in the case of capitalism only, and, to a certain extent of socialism. For capitalism the law of surplus value is elevated to the basic law. This, according to Chessin, was quite wrong. The basic features of the capitalist mode of production are expressed in the category *capital* and not in the category *surplus value,* which itself only constitutes a definition of capital. Marx, who in the famous three volumes of *Capital* investigated the content of capital, found ever new definitions, and in this way provided us with a comprehensive characterisation of the essential features of capitalism. To discover the basic laws of capitalism involves, therefore, revealing all the fundamental laws of motion of capital, including the law of surplus value.

[These extracts will be completed in the next issue of *Marxism Today,* along with a report of further Soviet discussions on value and price and socialist society.—*Editor.*]

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